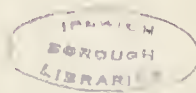
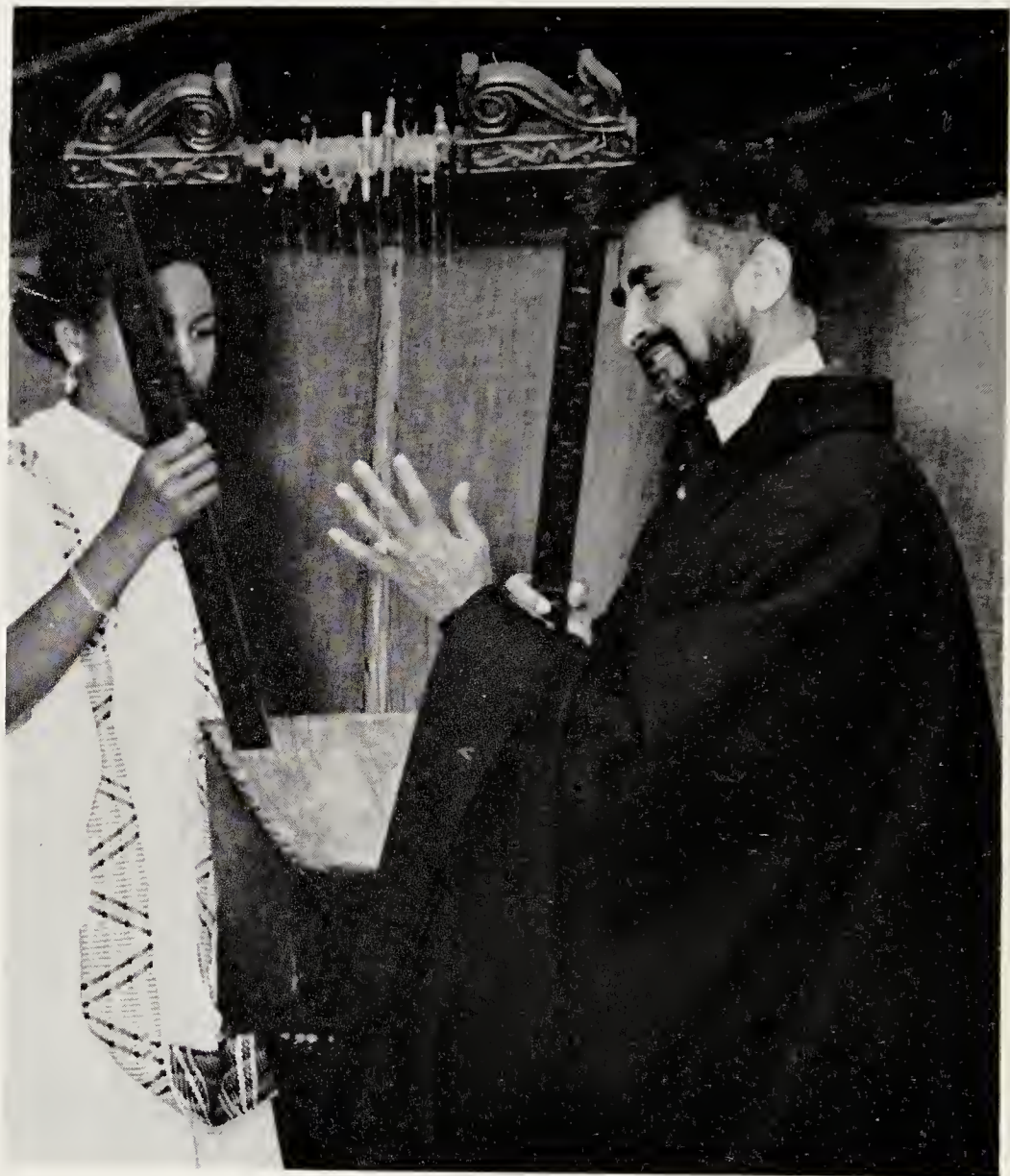


AN INTRODUCTION TO THE ECONOMIC
HISTORY OF ETHIOPIA





SHOUT
SHARE **IT**



Frontispiece: The Emperor Haile Sellassie I inspects the old Ethiopian bagana, or harp, traditionally played by monarchs and nobles.

An Introduction to
The Economic History
of
ETHIOPIA

from early times to 1800

RICHARD PANKHURST

B.Sc. (Econ.), Ph.D.

1961

LALIBELA HOUSE

Distributed by Sidgwick and Jackson Ltd.,
1 Tavistock Chambers, Bloomsbury Way, London, W.C.1.

Copyright © Richard Pankhurst 1961

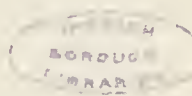
Made and printed in England by
STAPLES PRINTERS LIMITED
at their Rochester, Kent, establishment

Made and printed in England by
STAPLES PRINTERS LIMITED
at their Rochester, Kent, establishment

For L. F. - H.

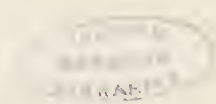
114

114



CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION BY DR. K. M. PANIKKAR	xi
AUTHOR'S PREFACE	xv
HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION	I
<i>The Red Sea and 'the Land of Punt' in Ancient Times . . . Indian Trade . . . The Periplus of the Eritrean Sea . . . The Adulis Inscriptions . . . The Inscriptions of Ezana . . . Aksumite Currency . . . The Conversion to Christianity . . . The Christian Topography . . . Aksumite Control of South Arabia . . . The Rise of Islam . . . The Decline of Aksum: Gudit and the Zagwe . . . The Solomonic Restoration . . . The Realm of Prester John in the Middle Ages . . . European Christendom and the Ottoman Turks . . . Ahmad Grañ and the Portuguese . . . The Galla Wars . . . The Later Portuguese . . . The Expulsion of the Jesuits . . . The Establishment of Gondar and the Decline of the Monarchy</i>	
ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL LIFE 1300-1800	91
<i>The Geography and Frontiers of the Realm</i>	104
<i>Government, Administration and Justice</i>	119
<i>The Seclusion of the Royal Family</i>	133
<i>The Absence of a Fixed Capital; and the Organization of the Court</i>	137
<i>Population and Towns</i>	143
<i>The Establishment of Gondar</i>	149
<i>The Army</i>	159
<i>The Effects of Warfare</i>	175
<i>State Revenues, Taxation, and Land Tenure</i>	179
<i>Church Property in Land</i>	195
<i>Church Schools</i>	199
<i>Agriculture</i>	200
<i>Livestock</i>	215
<i>Forestry</i>	221
<i>Mineral Wealth</i>	224
<i>The Peasant's Difficulties</i>	231

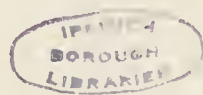


<i>Diseases and Medicines</i>	238
<i>Food and Drink</i>	248
<i>Clothing</i>	253
<i>Currency</i>	260
<i>Nile Waters</i>	269
<i>Problems of Communication</i>	272
<i>The Division of Labour</i>	281
<i>'Franks' and Other Foreigners</i>	289
<i>Internal Trade and Trade Routes</i>	307
<i>Ethiopia's Access to the Sea</i>	322
<i>The Ports and Foreign Trade</i>	338
<i>Trade in the Red Sea and Indian Ocean</i>	356
<i>Chinese Trade</i>	362
<i>The Slave Trade</i>	372
<i>Conclusion</i>	389
APPENDIX A. <i>List of Aksumite Kings who issued Coins</i>	401
APPENDIX B. <i>Analysis of Aksumite Currency</i>	402
APPENDIX C. <i>Urban Population Estimates 1520-1773</i>	406
APPENDIX D. <i>Chinese Coins Found in East Africa</i>	407
APPENDIX E. <i>The Habshis of India</i>	409
APPENDIX F. <i>Ibrahim Hannibal, Ancestor of Alexander Pushkin</i>	423
APPENDIX G. <i>Bibliography on Aksumite Currency</i>	427
BIBLIOGRAPHY	429
INDEX	437

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

The Emperor Haile Sellassie I inspects the old Ethiopian bagana, or harp, traditionally played by monarchs and nobles
frontispiece

	<i>Opposite page</i>
King Yekuno Amlak (1270-1285), the first sovereign of the restored Solomonic line.	46
King on the throne under the royal umbrella playing the bagana, or harp.	47
Travelling.	62
Traditional tent.	62
Building.	63
Wood-cutting.	63
Battle scene.	126
Portuguese arquebusier such as those who came to Ethiopia, seen through West African eyes.	126
Battle scenes.	127
Another warlike scene.	127
St. Mark writing.	142
A later writing scene.	143
Agricultural scene.	222
Ploughing.	222
Fishing with a net.	223
Water-carrier.	238



Slaughtering cattle.	238
Woman grinding corn with a stone.	239
Monks undertake woman's work.	239
At table.	302
A drinking party.	302
Banquet table with injera, or pancake bread, laid on it.	303
Drink being served.	303
Camel with pack.	303
The Hapshi commander, Malik Ambar.	318
Ibrahim, the great-grandfather of Alexander Pushkin.	318
An Ethiopian zebra brought to India in 1620.	319

Introduction

ETHIOPIA is a land famed in song and legend from the most ancient times. It enters into the story of Isis in Egypt. It is closely connected with the history of Solomon. Queen Hatshepsut sent a celebrated expedition to that land known to ancient Egyptians as Punt to collect its products, and her tomb is adorned with pictures commemorating that achievement. Further, Ethiopia seems to have been one of the first countries to accept Christianity. The Ethiopians claim that their conversion dates from apostolic times. Though this is doubtful, it is unquestionable that at least from the time of Athanasius, patriarch of Alexandria in the fourth century, Ethiopia has remained staunchly Christian.

It is also significant that of all the countries of Africa which had accepted Christianity in the early centuries, Ethiopia is the only one where it flourishes even now. Though nearest to Arabia and at all times in the closest contacts with Yemen and Mecca, Ethiopia was left well alone by the Arabs in the days of their great expansion. The reason given for this is interesting. In the early days of Mahommed's career when his followers were being persecuted in Mecca he sent a batch of refugees to Ethiopia where they were received and given protection by the Negus. In recognition of this early assistance the prophet himself is said to have commanded his followers never to attack Ethiopia, and except for sporadic raids by Turkish Governors and the invasion by Ahmad Grañ this injunction of the prophet has been a fairly effective guarantee of Ethiopia's independence even in the days when the name of Islam evoked terror in the minds of the most powerful nations of Europe.

During the Middle Ages, though little was known of Ethiopia in Europe, the legend of Prester John, the mysterious Christian monarch who ruled a vast and powerful empire somewhere in the East, exercised the imagination of Western Nations. No one was certain of its location. Some placed it in the heart of Asia and identified it with the empire of the Tatar Khans. Others placed it in Africa. But everyone agreed that the country was

extremely rich and that the monarch was a Christian and therefore presumed to be a natural ally against the Moslem powers that threatened Europe at the time. Slowly more dependable information began to reach Europe. The Portuguese King Dom Joao II sent to the Ethiopian Emperor a diplomatic mission under Pero de Covilham. Covilham was a linguist who spoke Arabic fluently. Adopting the Muslim dress he embarked on an Arab dhow and reached India in 1488, ten years before Vasco da Gama's arrival. From India he set out to Ethiopia.

With the arrival of the Portuguese on the Indian seas Ethiopia came to be better known to the West. In the beginning the Ethiopian monarchs would seem to have hoped that as fellow Christians they would receive assistance from the Portuguese, but in this they were on the whole disappointed. One thing, however, was significant. The letters which the Ethiopian monarchs addressed to the kings of Portugal (and later to Philip II of Spain) were generally for what we now term technical assistance. The Ethiopians recognized their backwardness, especially in armament, and were anxious to receive the assistance of their Christian brethren from Europe to improve their position. This, however, did not take place and in spite of four hundred years of contact with Europe Ethiopia remained backward and undeveloped till the very beginning of the twentieth century.

Though economically and politically backward, Ethiopia was, till the First World War, the only independent indigenous political community in Africa. Through all the crises which non-European nations underwent in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Ethiopia proudly maintained its freedom and the continuity of its tradition. Nor is this its sole claim to honour. The first defeat that European expansion suffered was at the hands of the Ethiopians at Adowa. The victory of Ethiopian forces over the armies of Italy, then trying to follow in the footsteps of other European nations and embark on a programme of imperialist expansion, was the first demonstration that European armies were not invincible. From this point of view it ranks with the historic battle of Lepanto and the victory of Tushima. If Lepanto marked the turn of Turkish ascendancy Adowa may well be considered the beginning of the end of imperialism. The victory of Japan over Russia only further emphasized the lesson which the Asian nations had learnt. It is no doubt true that the

Italians returned forty years later in the hope of avenging the disaster of Adowa, but Mussolini's short-lived annexation may be said to have been only the first act in the great drama which ended with the downfall of fascism in Europe.

Though Ethiopia is thus a country with a continuous and unbroken history, a political community which has maintained its independence throughout this long period except for the short-lived usurpation of Mussolini, strangely enough it is even now one of the countries whose history, social life and economic conditions are little known to the outside world. Even in the twentieth century Ethiopia remains to a large extent a country of mystery.

The present work on the Economic History of Ethiopia is therefore all the more to be welcomed because it deals comprehensively with the resources, trade and economic conditions of Ethiopia against a background of its political history before the modern period. Dr. Pankhurst is to be congratulated warmly on the thoroughness with which he has treated the subject and the new light he throws upon many obscure points. His book is factual, well documented and written with sympathy, and should prove a model for such studies on regions whose economic history has remained unexplored.

K. M. PANIKKAR

New Delhi,

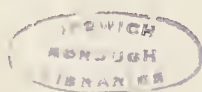
7 January 1961.

Preface

IN THIS book I have attempted a survey of Ethiopian economic life from the earliest times to the end of the eighteenth century, examining such topics as the system of government and taxation, the organization of the army and its effect on the economy, the mode of land tenure and the extent of urban development, the state of agriculture and farming, the utilization of forests and minerals, problems of communications and the direction of trade routes, the division of labour and the role of foreigners, health and medicine, the various types of currency and 'primitive money' employed, the character of internal and external trade, including the slave trade, and the question of access to the sea.

The arrangement of the work has been influenced by a number of considerations. The extent of time covered by the survey – over four millenia – and the ramifications of Ethiopian and East African trade rendered it necessary to set a wide geographical stage despite the fact that many parts of it might not be occupied at any time by the Ethiopian empire, the frontiers of which fluctuated considerably in this period. The availability of historical material and the need to take into consideration the non-specialist reader had also to be borne in mind. Though, as will be seen, a number of vitally important historical records exist for ancient times it seemed most convenient to discuss them in a historical introduction which was also designed to prepare the ground for a more detailed analysis of the five centuries from 1300 to 1800 for which period source material is more plentiful. Since many readers may be relatively unacquainted with either Ethiopian history or the broad characteristics of Ethiopian life it appeared useful to give an outline of the main historical developments in this period and to review and evaluate the chief historical sources and their geographical relevance, as well as to stray somewhat beyond the formal confines of economic history so as to touch upon subjects, such as armament, clothing and food and drink, which had an indirect relationship to economic life.

Because of the obvious danger of reading too much from one period into another the pages which follow are based mainly on



historical data contemporary with the time under consideration; the temptation to deduce the state of affairs in previous times from phenomena discerned in the nineteenth or early twentieth centuries – a temptation which is particularly strong in a country where there is evidence to indicate that in many fields conditions of life remained static – has as far as possible been resisted. This decision appeared the more justified as a companion volume on the later period, in course of preparation, will deal more comprehensively with such questions as land tenure and traditional medicine. For this last reason, too, it was decided that this work should aim mainly at the presentation of data, leaving the drawing of conclusions to the future.

The compilation of the work was greatly facilitated by generous friends who gave advice in specialist fields, assistance which was particularly welcome as much of the research had to be conducted away from the main centres of learning. Thanks are due to Professors B. Lewis, of London, J. Spencer Trimingham, of Glasgow, Philip Hitti, of Princeton, George F. Hourani, of Michigan, and Hussain F. al Hamdani, of Cairo, for introducing me to Arab sources; to J. V. Mills, of the London School of Oriental and African Studies, who was kindness itself in furnishing me with essential references to Chinese materials; to Dr. P. Hardy, also of the School of Oriental and African Studies, Professor Mohamed Wahid Mirza, of Lucknow, and Professor Hadi Hasan, of Aligarh, who acted as specialist consultants in the field of Indian history; to my friend Dr. I. H. Vanden Driesen, of the University of Ceylon, for advice on the history of the island; to Dr. Eric Axelson, of Witwatersrand, for ideas on Portuguese exploration; to Professor Hugh Seton-Watson, of London, Professor George Vernadsky, of Yale, and N. Izmailov, of the U.S.S.R. Academy of Sciences, for information about Ethiopian slaves in Russia; to Professor R. J. H. Jenkins, of London, for advice on Byzantine history; to George C. Miles, Curator of the American Numismatic Society, and Walter H. Maurer, of the Library of Congress, for information on coins; to Dr. Sir G. S. P. Freeman-Grenville, of Tanga, James Kirkman, Warden of the Coastal Sites of Kenya, Colonel A. T. Curle, formerly of the British Embassy, Addis Ababa, Dr. A. Malamat, of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Dr. I. M. Lewis, of the University of Central Africa, and Jacqueline Pirenne of the

University of Leiden who were tireless in answering my queries on recent archaeological research in areas around Ethiopia.

I would particularly thank C. F. Beckingham, of the University of Manchester, for generously allowing me to see extracts from the Hakluyt Society's important new edition of Alvares which he was preparing with G. W. B. Huntingford and which was not published at the time of writing; Dr. H. F. Mooney, of the British Middle East Development Division, and Dr. Stefan Strelcyn, of Warsaw, whose assistance in the identification of useful Ethiopian plants was invaluable; and A. J. Drewes, of Leiden, whose opinion on Harari coins I have ventured to quote.

I would also thank many friends who have helped me in translating passages from various languages : Alemayehu Mogos from Geez, Seyoum Sebhat and Endreas Eshete from Amharic, Bereket H. Sellassie, Dr. Mangasha Gabre Hiwot, and Nerayo Issaias from Tigrinya, Mohamed Sherif and Mohamed Abdulrahman from Arabic, Lynn Martin and G. C. Savard from Latin, A. J. Lino Sequeira and Mrs. J. A. Mendes from Portuguese.

Special thanks are due to the indefatigable Louis Haber and to Mehr S. Fardoonji who acted as voluntary research assistants when I was unable to read at the British Museum Library myself.

I would express my gratitude to Stephen Wright, of the National Library of Ethiopia, whose long acquaintance with Ethiopia, eagle eye and ceaseless interest prevented many an error from slipping into the text, and who most kindly read the proofs.

Finally I would thank my wife, Rita, who was kept hard at work reading successive drafts, suggesting alterations of form and content.

R. K. P. P.

P.O.B. 1896,
Addis Ababa.



HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

Historical Introduction

The Red Sea and 'the Land of Punt' in Ancient Times

FROM THE point of view of world trade the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean acquired importance at an early period of world history. The region was flanked on either side by Egypt and Persia, two of the most ancient centres of wealth and civilization, while the Horn of Africa itself was relatively easy of access and provided tropical products much prized in the ancient world. The Red Sea was, moreover, an important channel for trade between the Mediterranean basin and the Far East, two regions of vastly different civilization which were nevertheless linked by commercial ties from earliest times.¹

Though separated by an immense stretch of water, travel between the Horn of Africa and the countries of the East was greatly facilitated by the direction of the winds. Every December the trade wind, or monsoon, began to blow from the north-north-east, i.e. from Asia to Africa, and continued with remarkable steadiness till the end of February. From April till September the process was reversed, a strong wind from the south-south-west blowing from Africa to Asia.²

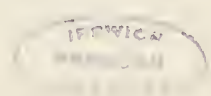
The first people to tell us anything of the Horn of Africa were the Egyptians who appear to have referred to parts of Eritrea and the Somali coast as the Land of Punt though this term was also used for the land on the opposite shore of the Red Sea.

Egyptian vessels may have reached the Horn of Africa as early as the First or Second Dynasty (3400–2980 B.C.), for there is evidence that the Pharaohs at that time already used myrrh,³ a product of this area, in considerable quantities, though it may have been obtained through intermediate tribes who brought it by land. In the Fourth Dynasty (2900–2750 B.C.) a son of Cheops, the builder of the Great Pyramid, possessed a slave from 'the Land of Punt' but he could also have been brought to Egypt by land. By the Fifth Dynasty we find King Sahure (c. 2470 B.C.)

1. Conti Rossini, *Storia d'Etiopia*, pp. 42–6; Warmington, *passim*.

2. Coupland, p. 15.

3. *Vide* Lucas, pp. 113–14.



dispatching an expedition to the Land of Punt which he termed the 'God's-Land'. From this region he is reported to have obtained the fragrant gums and resins then so highly prized for incense and ointment. His expedition brought back 2,600 staves of a black wood resembling ebony, 80,000 measures of myrrh, and 6,000 units of electrum (a gold-silver alloy),⁴ though what these quantities amounted to we do not know.⁵

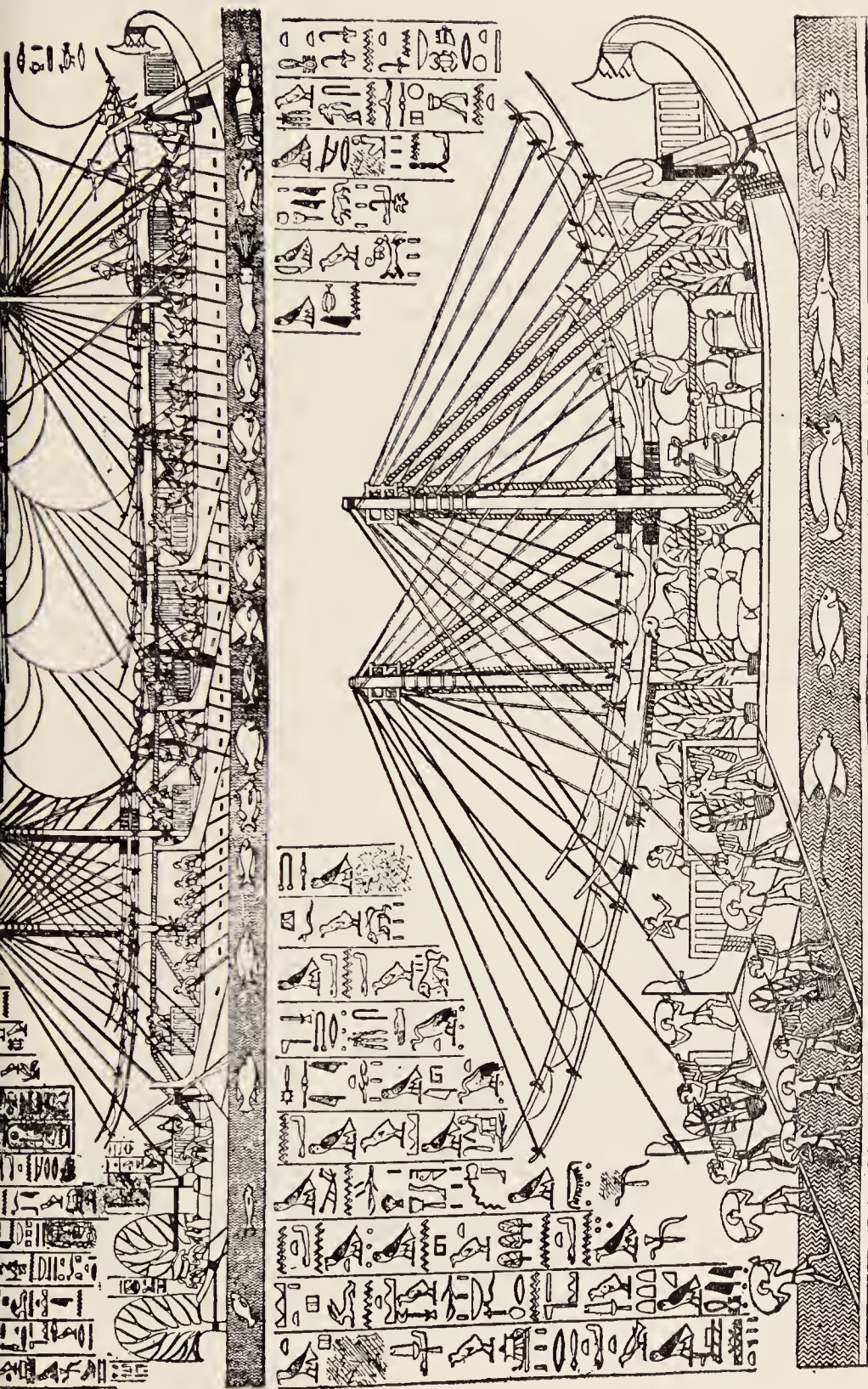
In the middle kingdom (2000-1800 B.C.) the Pharaohs sent further naval expeditions to Punt. This intercourse with East Africa is reflected in a contemporary Egyptian legend describing how the only survivor of an Egyptian ship wrecked in the Red Sea is cast upon an island two months' journey from Thebes. The serpent on the island claims to be the prince of Punt with command over a variety of spices and African animals.

The importance of the Red Sea at this time can be seen from the fact that it was considered worth while to cut a canal between it and the Nile, probably during the reign of Sesostriis (1980-1935 B.C.), a Pharaoh of the Twelfth Dynasty. During the subsequent Hyksos invasion of Egypt and the period of disturbances (1801-1584 B.C.), however, Egyptian commerce with the southern Red Sea area ceased and the canal gradually silted up.

Contact with Punt was nevertheless quickly resumed in the new kingdom. Queen Hatshepsut sent an important expedition to this region, probably in 1495 B.C. It is recorded in one of her inscriptions that while building her magnificent temple at Thebes she learnt that the God Amon desired her 'to establish for him a Punt in his house'. To carry out this quaintly phrased design it was necessary to plant the terraces of the temple with myrrh trees from Punt. Her ancestors, we are told, had often sent expeditions thither, but none had ever been equipped to bring back the trees; and indeed for a long time, as far back as anyone could remember, even the myrrh necessary for the incense in the temple service - which may have come from northern Eritrea - had been passed from hand to hand by overland traffic until it had reached Egypt. But as the queen stood before the shrine of the god, 'a command was heard from the great throne, an oracle of the god himself, that the ways to Punt should be searched out, that the highways to the myrrh-terraces should be penetrated'. For, so said

4. *Vide* *ibid.*, pp. 267-8.

5. Breasted, p. 127; *vide* also Budge, Vol. I, pp. 7, 230.



Queen Hatshepsut's boats trading with the Land of Punt, from a series of reliefs in the Der el Bahri temple at Thebes. The upper picture shows the departure of the fleet; the lower, vessels being loaded with myrrh trees and other goods.

From J. H. Breasted, *A History of Egypt*.

the god, 'it is a glorious region of God's Land, it is indeed my place of delight; I have made it for myself in order to divert my heart'. The inscription added: 'it was done according to all that the majesty of this god commanded.'⁶

The organization and command of the expedition was entrusted by the queen to her chief treasurer Nehsi, in whose coffers the wealth brought back was to be stored. With propitiatory offerings to the divinities of the air to ensure a fair wind, five vessels set sail early in the ninth year of the Queen's reign. They travelled down the Nile and through a canal which led from the eastern delta via the Wadi Tumilat to the Red Sea. Besides plentiful merchandise for barter they bore a great statue of the queen to be erected in Punt. Unfortunately neither historians nor archaeologists have since been able to trace this statue.

In due course the expedition arrived safely in Punt. The Egyptian commander pitched his tent on the shore, where he was received with friendliness by a chief called Perehu, who had a corpulent wife and three children. It was so long since any Egyptians had been seen in that part of the world that the Egyptians describe the Puntites crying out, 'Why have ye come hither unto this land, which the people (of Egypt) know not? Did ye descend upon the road of heaven, or did ye sail upon the water, upon the sea of God's Land?' The Puntite chief, having been satisfied with the beads, axes, daggers and bracelets he had received, lively trading began. The ships were drawn up to the beach, gang-planks were run out and loading went rapidly forward. Soon the boats were heavily laden with marvels of the country: fragrant woods, myrrh-resin, fresh myrrh-trees, black wood similar to ebony, ivory, gold, cinnamon-wood, incense,⁷ eye-cosmetic, panther skins, baboons, monkeys, and dogs as well as some of the people of the area and their children. 'Never', the Egyptians claimed, 'was the like of this brought for any king who has been since the beginning.'

Though cinnamon is both here and later referred to as an export of East Africa, it appears that it was not produced in the Red Sea area of either Africa or Arabia, as believed by the ancients, but came from farther afield. 'Cinnamon', writes the American W. H. Schoft, 'was brought back from India and the

6. Breasted, p. 274.

7. *Vide* Lucas, pp. 110-13.

Far East to the Somali coast, and there mixed with bark from laurel leaves, and taken thence to Arabia and Egypt.⁸

After a calm and safe voyage the Egyptian fleet at length returned home to Thebes. The citizens of this city saw an unequalled display as the Puntites and the produce of their realm passed through the streets to the palace where the commander presented them to Queen Hatshepsut. After inspecting everything, she presented a portion of the goods to the god Amon. This presentation included thirty-one living myrrh-trees, electrum, eye-cosmetic, throw-sticks of the Puntites, black wood, ivory, shells, a live panther, which had been especially caught for her, many panther skins and 3,300 small cattle. Huge piles of myrrh of twice a man's stature were measured in grain-measures by the queen's favourite, and large rings of commercial gold were weighed in tall balances ten feet high. Then, after formally announcing to Amon the success of the expedition which his oracle had commanded, Hatshepsut summoned the court, giving to one of her favourites and to the chief treasurer places of honour at her feet, while she told the nobles the result of her great venture. This account of the expedition was then recorded in relief on the wall of her temple.⁹

The Italian Ethiopist Conti Rossini, discussing the light which this relief throws on East African history, notes that the principal produce illustrated as coming from the Land of Punt was obtainable in Eritrea or elsewhere on the Horn of Africa at a later period. The Puntites, he notes, are given Caucasian features and dark skins while the chief, Perehu, carries a dagger similar to those still seen in Northern Eritrea and the Sudan. He emphasises, however, that the scenes purporting to show activities in Punt cannot be considered accurate as they were drawn by artists who had never been there and who, therefore, relied solely on the descriptions of sailors and soldiers. The drawings of the Egyptians, moreover, were generally not 'photographic' but rather caricatures: the corpulent woman above-mentioned was probably so depicted in contrast to the people of Egypt who by convention were represented as tall and slender.¹⁰

Egyptian records tell us that Thutmose III (1501-1447 B.C.) of the Eighteenth Dynasty sent another great expedition to Punt

8. Schoff, pp. 82-4; Lucas, pp. 353-4.

9. Breasted, pp. 274-8.

10. Conti Rossini, pp. 46-8.

which brought back the usual commodities: ivory, black wood, panther skins, gold and over two hundred and twenty-three bushels of myrrh, as well as male and female slaves and many cattle.¹¹ Some three decades later after a further interval of disturbances in Egypt, Ramses III (1198–1167 B.C.) dispatched another large fleet to Punt. The canal from the Nile through the Wadi Tumilat to the Red Sea was now apparently in disuse, for it is recorded that the fleet, after a successful voyage, returned to a harbour somewhere on the Red Sea coast where the entire cargo was landed; it was then carried in donkey-packs to Coptos where it was loaded on to Nile boats and floated down the river to the king's residence in the eastern delta.¹² Ramses IV, the son of Ramses III, continued this traffic with the Land of Punt, but was apparently the last Pharaoh to do so.¹³

Conti Rossini commenting on these later voyages remarks that they may well have taken the Egyptians to the vicinity of what is now Massawa. He suggests, tentatively, that the port of Utulit, which the Egyptians say they visited, may be identified as the Aksumite port of Adulis; that the neighbouring area of Amasu or Hamasu, referred to by the Egyptians, may perhaps be the Hamasien of later days; and that the nearby people of Tecaru may be none other than the people of Tigre.¹⁴

After the decline of ancient Egypt the Phoenicians emerged as important mariners in the Red Sea and appear to have traded with the Horn of Africa. In the *Book of Kings* it is stated that 'King Solomon (c. 974–932 B.C.) made a navy of ships in Ezion-geber, which is beside Eloth on the shore of the Red Sea, in the land of Edom, and Hiram (King of Tyre) sent in the navy his servants, shipmen that had knowledge of the sea, with the servants of Solomon. And they came to Ophir and fetched thence gold, four hundred and twenty talents, and brought it to King Solomon'. The *Book of Kings* elsewhere refers to Solomon and Hiram importing gold and silver, ivory, apes and peacocks.¹⁵

It is believed that Hiram's ships were made of oak from the forests of Edom and that they were built at Ezion-geber (the modern Tallal-Khulayfah west of Aqaba) where an American expedition in 1938–40 discovered large nails of iron, and copper

11. Breasted, p. 305.

12. *ibid.*, pp. 385–6.

13. Conti Rossini, p. 50.

14. *ibid.*, p. 48. *Vide* also Keller, p. 50.

15. I Kings, ix. 26–8; x. 22.

alloyed with iron, fragments of thick ropes, lumps of caulking pitch and pieces of resin for coating.¹⁶ The exact location of Ophir is uncertain though it was probably somewhere on the Red Sea coast of Africa. The nineteenth-century missionary J. L. Krapf who discusses the matter at length considered that Ophir was on the Dankali coast where the inhabitants still called their country Afer; other commentators, however, have preferred to place the region elsewhere on the East African coast, in south or south-east Arabia, or even in the Far East, whereas Dr. A. Malamat, of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, equates Ophir with Afri, the root of the word Africa.

Ethiopian tradition holds that when Solomon was collecting materials with which to build the Temple he employed the services of an Ethiopian merchant called Tamrin who was also the servant of Makeda the Queen of Sheba. The Ethiopian history, the *Kebra Nagast*, which, as we shall see, was written two millenia later, states that the Queen was exceedingly rich and that her merchants traded for her by sea and by land from India to Aswan. Tamrin was supposed to have owned 520 camels and 'about three and seventy ships'. From him she is said to have learnt of the wisdom of Solomon, and thereupon resolved to visit him in Jerusalem. Accordingly 'seven hundred and ninety-seven camels were loaded and mules and asses innumerable'.

The famous visit of the Queen is referred to in the *Book of Kings* as follows :

'And when the Queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the Lord, she came to prove him with questions.

'And she came to Jerusalem with a very great train, with camels that bore spices, and very much gold, and precious stones, and when she was come to Jerusalem, she communed with him of all that was in her heart.'

The *Kebra Nagast* goes on to tell how Makeda returned to her native land and in due course gave birth to a son by Solomon. The infant, who was named David, subsequently ascended the Ethiopian throne as Menelik I, founder of the Solomonic line.¹⁷

16. Hourani, p. 9.

17. Krapf, pp. 517-9. *Vide* also Hastings, Vol. III, pp. 626-8; Guillaing, Vol. I, Part I, pp. 10-60; I Kings, x. 1-2; Budge, *The Queen of Sheba*, p. 22.

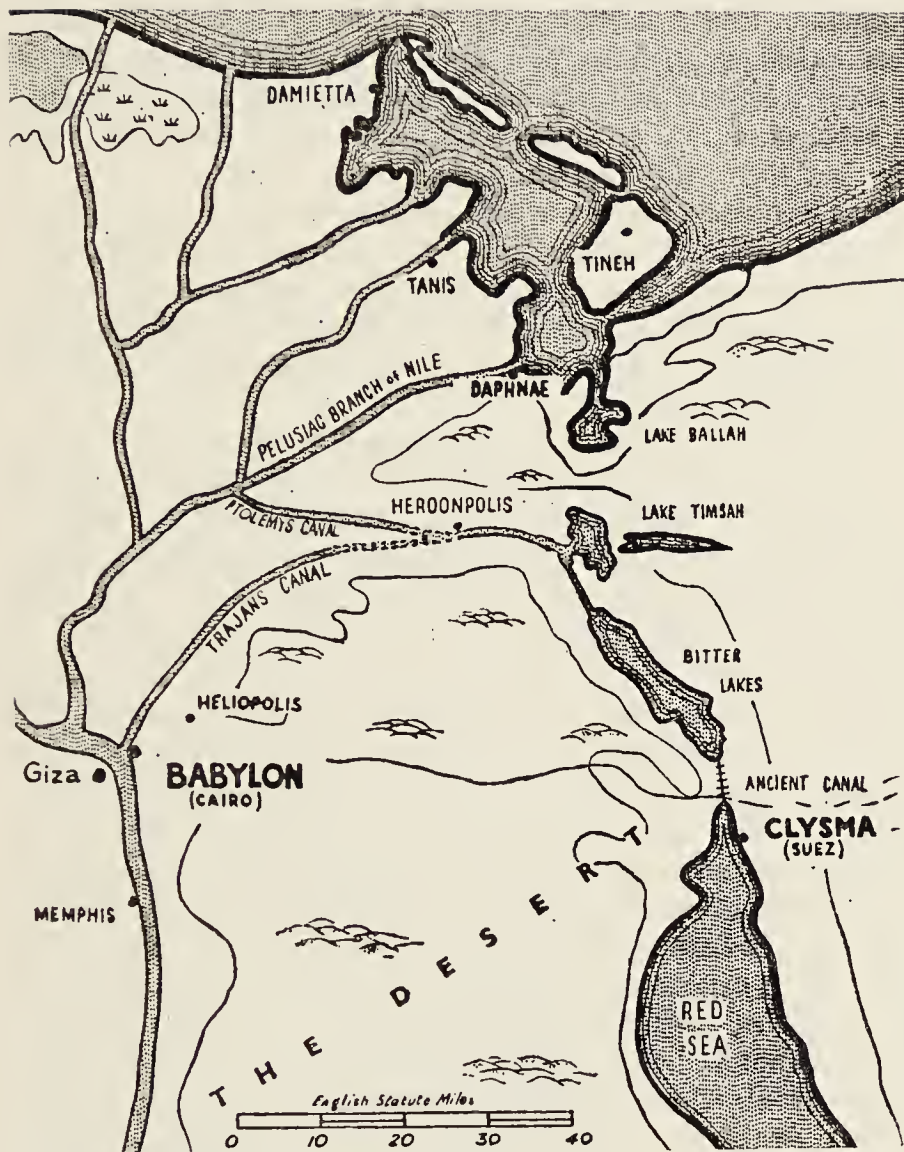
There is little evidence of maritime activity in the Red Sea during the neo-Babylonian period (626–539 B.C.), but the subsequent period of Persian greatness saw a considerable expansion of trade as the Persians united western Asia and Egypt, thereby increasing the economic and strategic importance of the Red Sea area which lay between the two parts of their empire. Darius the Great (521–485 B.C.) realizing the value of linking Persia with Egypt sent a fleet round Arabia and along the Red Sea. He also dug, or re-dug, the canal from the eastern branch of the Nile through the lakes to Suez. He then sent a fleet from the Nile along this canal to the Red Sea and thence to Persia.

Two centuries later the conquests of Alexander the Great (*d.* 323 B.C.) and his founding of Alexandria had a profound effect on the economy of the area. The city rapidly emerged as a great commercial centre whose trade, assisted by the statesmanship of the Ptolemies and the energy of the Greek merchants, extended along the entire length of the Red Sea and thence to Persia, India and even China. In 275 B.C. Ptolemy II (Ptolemy Philadelphus, 285–257 B.C.) once more reopened the old canal between the Nile and the Red Sea which had again been allowed to silt up. His action was a clear indication of the importance he attached to Red Sea trade. We are told that he displayed ‘Ethiopian’ as well as Arabian and other sheep to the public as an evidence of the efforts he was making to meet the needs of his subjects. He extended Egyptian trade as far as Cape Guardafui devoting much attention to the Red Sea coast of Africa whence he obtained supplies of elephants which he used in his wars against the Seleucids of Syria. George Hourani of Princeton University rightly calls these animals ‘the tanks of the ancient world’.¹⁸

His successor, Ptolemy III (Ptolemy Euergetes I, 247–222 B.C.) was equally familiar with the Red Sea coast. He erected a tablet at the port of Adulis where it was later copied by Cosmas, a sixth-century traveller whose writings will be discussed in later pages. The inscription reads as follows :

‘The great King, Ptolemy and Queen Arsinoë, twin gods, grandson of the two sovereigns King Ptolemy and Queen Berenice – gods sôtôres – sprung from Hercules the son of Jupiter on the father’s side, and on the mother’s side from Dionysus the

18. Rostovtzeff, p. 358; Wainwright, p. 114; Hourani, p. 19.



Map of the Nile Delta showing the canals of ancient times.

From H. J. Schonfield, *The Suez Canal in World Affairs*.

son of Jupiter – having received from his father the Kingdom of Egypt and Libya and Syria and Phoenicia and Cyprus, and Lycia and Caria, and the Islands of the Cyclades, made an expedition into Asia with forces of infantry and cavalry, and a fleet and elephants from the Troglodytes¹⁹ and Ethiopia – animals which his father and himself were the first to capture by hunting in those countries, and which they took down to Egypt, where they had them trained for employment in war.²⁰

The Red Sea trade was at this time treated as a royal monopoly of the Ptolemies. Professor J. Oliver Thomson remarks that their expeditions read like echoes of the earlier Pharaonic visitations to Punt. At least fourteen officers of the second and third Ptolemies are mentioned as giving their names to the capes and roadsteads of the Red Sea coast.²¹

Commerce between the Mediterranean and eastern worlds continued to expand in the next few centuries. During the reign of Ptolemy VII (Euergetes II, 146–116 B.C.) there is evidence of direct sailings between Egypt and India, while the Roman author Pliny complains that an extravagant amount of frankincense (presumably from Arabia or Somaliland) was burnt by the Emperor Nero (A.D. 54–68) at the funeral of his second wife Poppaea. By this time the canal between the Nile and the Red Sea appears once again to have fallen into disuse; western exports – wine, bronze, tin, gold and various manufactured articles – were therefore taken up the Nile to Coptus and were carried thence overland to Myus Hormus or Berenice on the Red Sea.²²

The Romans in their day were no less interested in the Red Sea than the Ptolemies before them. The Emperor Augustus dispatched an expedition to South Arabia in 25–24 B.C. which was led by Aelius Gallus, the prefect of Egypt. He sailed from the Gulf of Suez to Leuce Come, on the north-west coast of Arabia, and then marched hundreds of miles over the desert coast of western Arabia as far as the Yaman, before sailing back to Leuce Come, in which operation he lost many ships, some with all aboard. According to Strabo, the Greek geographer and historian who accompanied him, this was ‘because of the difficulties of the voyage, but not because of any enemy’. *The Periplus of the*

19. Cave dwellers, who, according to Ptolemy the Geographer, c. A.D. 150, inhabited the coastal region of what is now the Sudan and Eritrea. *Vide* Conti Rossini, pp. 57–63.

21. Thomson, p. 136.

20. Cosmas, pp. 57–9.

22. Hourani, p. 29.

Erythraean Sea, a trade manual written later in the century which will be discussed in another section, suggests that the Romans occupied the port of Arabia Eudaemon (Aden) during the reign of Claudius (A.D. 41–54) or slightly earlier. At this time the Romans were also in alliance with the Himyarite prince of Zafar in the Yaman mountains, and thus had considerable influence in South Arabia.²³

Indian Trade

Indian commerce with the Horn of Africa was, as the *Periplus* suggests, of great antiquity; it owed much of its importance to the fact that the African coast lay on the trade route from India to Egypt and the Roman Empire. By the first century B.C. this trade had become so lucrative that it was carried out by large numbers of merchants and navigators from both east and west.

Strabo remarked that as many as one hundred and twenty vessels sailed in his time from the Egyptian Red Sea port of Myos Hormus, whereas formerly, under the Ptolemies, only a few ventured to undertake the voyage and to carry on traffic in Indian merchandise.²⁴

Pliny, too, underlined the importance of India's trade with the west. Writing about a century later he declares that in no year did India absorb less than fifty million sersteces (about £425,000) of the Roman Empire's wealth, and that it sent back merchandise which sold at 'a hundred times its prime cost'. Because of the monsoons boats left Egypt for India and the East at midsummer, before the dogstar rose or immediately after its rising, and reached the Arabian port of Cella or Cane (Hisn Ghorab) in the frankincense producing district after about thirty days. The return journey from India usually started at the beginning of the Egyptian month of *Tybis* (December), and never later than the sixth day of *Mechir* (13th January).²⁵

Over a millennium and a half later the Scottish traveller James Bruce of Kinnaird pointed to the significance of the trade winds which from early times had so greatly facilitated trading connections between India and the Red Sea. 'The reader will observe,'

23. Strabo, XVI, iv, 23.

24. *ibid.*, II, v, 12.

25. Pliny, VI, xxvi, 101–2, 104, 106. See Rackham edition, p. 416 n for conversion rates for sersteces.

he explained, 'that a vessel sailing from Suez or the Elanitic Gulf (Gulf of Aqaba), in any of the summer months, will find a steady wind at north-west, which will carry it in the direction of the Gulf to Mocha. At Mocha, the coast is east and west to the Straits of Babelmandeb, so that the vessel from Mocha will have variable winds for a short space, but mostly westerly, and these will carry her on to the Straits. She is then done with the monsoon in the Gulf, which was from the north, and being in the Indian Ocean, is taken up by the monsoon which blows in the summer months there, and is directly contrary to what obtains in the Gulf. This is a south-wester, which carries the vessel with a flowing sail to any part in India, without delay or impediment.

'The same happens upon her return home. She sails in the winter months by the monsoon proper to that sea, that is, with a north-east wind which carries her through the Straits of Babelmandeb. She finds within the Gulf, a wind at south-east, directly contrary to what was in the ocean; but then her course is contrary likewise, so that a south-easter, answering to the direction of the Gulf, carries her directly to Suez, or the Elanitic Gulf, whichever way she proposes going.'²⁶

From ancient times, he continued, providence had been 'kind to India' which enjoyed a superabundance of three valuable export commodities which were prized in Africa: pepper, silk and cotton. Of all the spices pepper, he thought, was rightly considered the 'greatest friend to the health of man'; 'nowhere known but in India', it grew 'spontaneously, and was gathered without toil'. 'The silkworm, with little fatigue and trouble to man, almost without his interference provided him with a stuff, at once the softest, the most light and brilliant, and consequently the best adapted to warm countries.' Cotton grew 'everywhere in great abundance and without care'; it could be considered 'almost equal to silk, in many of its qualities', and was superior in so far as it was cheaper and therefore more suitable for general use.²⁷

Speke, who during his journey to discover the source of the White Nile several decades later met many Indian merchants deep in the interior of Africa, was much impressed by the age-old character of their trade. He drew attention to the fact that Indians had been acquainted with the region in ancient times

26. Bruce, 1st ed., Vol. I, pp. 432-3.

27. *ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 372-3.



Banian (Indian merchant) with his account sheet.
 From J. H. Speke, *Journal of the Discovery of the Nile*.

and had names of their own for most of its important landmarks. He noted that they had been mistaken, however, in believing that Lake Victoria joined another vast expanse of water which they called the 'Lake of Amara or of the Gods', presumably through a confusion with Lake Tana and Amhara province.²⁸

Speke observes that nothing was written concerning the southern part of East Africa 'until the Hindus, who traded with the east coast of Africa, opened commercial dealings with its people in slaves and ivory, possibly sometime prior to the birth of our Saviour, when associated with their name, Men of the Moon, sprang into existence the Mountains of the Moon'.²⁹ 'I came . . . to the conclusion,' he added, 'that all our previous information concerning the hydrography of these regions, as well as of the Mountains of the Moon, originated with the ancient Hindus, who told it to the priests of the Nile; and that all busy Egyptian geographers, who disseminated *their* knowledge with a

28. Wilford, *passim*.

29. Speke, pp. 84-5.

view to be famous for *their* long-sightedness in solving the deep-seated mystery which enshrouded the source of their holy river, were so many hypothetical humbugs. Reasoning thus, the Hindu traders alone, in those days, I believed, had a firm basis to stand upon, from their intercourse with the Abyssinians through whom they must have heard of the country of Amara, which they applied to the Nyanza – and with the Wanyamuezi, or Men of the Moon, from whom they heard of the Tanganyika and Karagué mountains.³⁰

Indian trade with the Horn of Africa was important throughout recorded history; its character remained largely unchanged for century after century as will be seen by the almost identical references to it by foreign observers both in the Middle Ages and in later times.

The Periplus of the Eritraean Sea

Ethiopian economic history dawns in the bright, yet shadowy glory of the Aksumite Empire, the achievements of which can be seen to this day in the ruins of its cities and towns, reservoirs and dams, temples and stelae – relics of a great civilization of considerable importance in world history.³¹

The first historical document touching on the economy of this empire is, as we have seen, the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, a manual of trading conditions in the Red Sea believed to have been written in the last half of the first century A.D. probably by a Graeco-Egyptian sea captain.³² This detailed account of the principal Red Sea ports and their foreign trade states that the Emperor's maritime dominions stretched at that time along the coast of what is now Eritrea as far as the 'Berber Country', i.e. the coast of Somaliland, though some of the ports in the latter region, were 'not subject to a king, but each ruled by a separate chief'. An indication of the close relations with the Greeks, who were at that time the paramount maritime power, is afforded by a reference to the fact that Zoscales, the Aksumite ruler of the day, was 'acquainted with Greek literature'.³³ This king, the

30. *ibid.*, p. 264.

31. Bent, pp. 175–97; 215–30; Pankhurst, pp. 60–97.

32. For a discussion on the date of the *Periplus*, *vide* Guillain, Vol. I, Part I, pp. 83–4.

33. *Periplus*, p. 23.

Periplus adds, was 'grasping in his ways, but otherwise upright'. Zoscales, we may note, has been identified with Za Hakele who, according to the Ethiopian Chronicles, reigned for thirteen years. The nineteenth-century British traveller Henry Salt supposed that he ruled from A.D. 76 to 89, but W. H. Schoff, the American editor of the *Periplus*, argues that A.D. 59 would be a more likely coronation date.³⁴ From the *Periplus*, we learn that Adulis (on the west side of the Bay of Zula not far from Massawa) was already a major trading centre and the main port of the empire. It is described in this work as 'a fair-sized village', though Pliny (c. A.D. 23-79) calls it 'a very large centre'. There are indications that its commerce was suffering from the activities of nearby warlike peoples who did not appreciate the benefits of peaceful trade. Adulis, the *Periplus* states, was 'a port established by law, lying at the inner end of a bay that runs in toward the south. Before the harbour lies the so-called Mountain Island, about two hundred stadia³⁵ (twenty miles) seaward from the very head of the bay, with the shores of the mainland close to it on both sides. Ships bound for this port now anchor here because of attacks from the land. They used formerly to anchor at the very head of the bay, by an island called Diodorus (Dissei), close to the shore, which could be reached on foot from the land, by which means the barbarous natives attacked the island'.³⁶

Unfortunately for our knowledge of this period the author of the *Periplus* does not seem to have visited the interior of the country. He refers, however, to the town of Coloe (Kohaito of modern times)³⁷ which he describes as being three days' journey from Adulis and 'the first market for ivory'. He also mentions Aksum, the capital of the empire, which he terms 'the city of the people called Aksumites'. It was a further five days' journey inland and the commercial centre through which 'all the ivory is brought from the country beyond the Nile through the district called Cyeneum (Sennar?), and thence to Adulis'.

Discussing this important article of export, he adds: 'practically the whole number of elephants and rhinoceroses that are killed

34. *ibid.*, pp. 66-7. *Vide* also Budge, *History of Ethiopia*, Vol. I, p. 209.

35. According to Schoff ten stadia of the *Periplus* were equal to the English mile. For a discussion on this point see *ibid.*, pp. 54-5.

36. *ibid.*, p. 23.

37. *Vide* Bent, pp. 215-18, 223; *Guida dell'Africa Orientale Italiana*, p. 291.

live in the places inland, although at rare intervals they are hunted on the sea-coast even near Adulis.³⁸

The *Periplus* gives us a valuable account of the Horn of Africa's foreign trade at this period. It indicates that Egyptian ships arrived between January and September in which month they left, evidently on account of the monsoon. Of Adulis and the neighbouring ports it observes: 'there are imported into these places, undressed cloth³⁹ made in Egypt for the Berbers; robes from Arsinoë;⁴⁰ cloaks of poor quality dyed in colours; double-fringed linen mantles; many articles of flint glass, and others of *murrhine*,⁴¹ made in Diospolis;⁴² and brass which was used for ornament and—in cut pieces—instead of coin; sheets of soft copper, used for cooking utensils and cut up for bracelets and anklets for the women; iron which is made into spears used against the elephants and other wild beasts, and in their wars. Besides these, small axes are imported, and adzes and swords; copper drinking cups, round and large; a little coin for those coming to the market; wine of Laodicea (Latakia in Syria) and Italy, not much; olive oil, not much; for the king, gold and silver plate made after the fashion of the country, and for clothing, military cloaks, and thin coats of skin, of no great value. Likewise from the district of Ariaca (north-west India) across this sea, there are imported Indian iron and steel, and Indian cotton cloth, the broad cloth called *monache*(?) and that called *sagmatogene*(?), and girdles, and coats of skin and coloured lac.'⁴³

The *Periplus* has little to say about the exports of Adulis and sums them up briefly as 'ivory, tortoise-shell and rhinoceros-horn.' Pliny, on the other hand, relates that the port traded in a large quantity of ivory, rhinoceros-horns, hippopotamus-hides, apes and slaves'.⁴⁴ Tortoise-shell was a coastal product which according to the *Periplus* was obtained near the small sandy

38. *Periplus*, p. 23.

39. This Egyptian cloth was linen according to Schoff.

40. Arsinoë was a port situated near the present-day town of Suez but farther inland, the gulf having receded in the intervening centuries.

41. *Murrhine*, believed to be agate from the Gulf of Cambay, but the reference is probably to a cheap imitation in coloured glass which was extensively produced by the Phoenicians and Egyptians.

42. Diospolis, literally the City of God, was probably Thebes, the metropolis of the Egyptian Empire and the modern Karnak.

43. *ibid.*, p. 24.

44. *ibid.*, p. 24; Pliny, VI, 34.

islands called Alalali (Dahlak), to the east of Adulis, whither it was brought for sale by a people who are described as 'fish-eaters'. Another export from the coast was obsidian, a volcanic glass which according to the *Periplus*, was found exclusively at a spot eight hundred *stadia* to the east of Adulis (evidently at Hawakil Bay) where there was a great mound of sand piled up at the right of the entrance on top of obsidian deposits. Pliny describing this stone declares that it was very dark, sometimes transparent, but dull to the sight and reflecting the shadow rather than the image. It was used he tells us, for jewellery, statues and votive offerings.⁴⁵ The Roman Emperor Domitian used it to face a portico so that from the reflections on its polished surface he could detect anyone approaching him from the rear.

To the south-east of Adulis, lay what the *Periplus* called the 'Berber market towns', or 'far-side ports' because they were on the other side of the Red Sea from Arabia. These ports lay 'at intervals one after the other, without harbours', but had roadsteads where ships could anchor and lie in good weather. The first of these ports was called Avalites (which Schoff identifies as the modern Zeila, the old name being preserved in that of the nearby village of Abalit).⁴⁶ The coast at this point could only be reached by boats and rafts. The principal imports were 'glass, assorted; juice of sour grapes from Diospolis; dressed cloth, assorted, made for the Berbers; wheat, wine and a little tin'. Exports consisted of spices, a little ivory, tortoise-shell and 'a very little myrrh, but better than the rest'. Myrrh, we may add, was obtainable at most places along the coast, being grown in the lowlands not too far from the sea. All these articles were purchased by big merchants who visited many lands or by 'the Berbers themselves' who 'crossed on rafts to Ocelis (at the entrance of the Red Sea) and Muza (probably Mocha) on the opposite shore'. The use of rafts is also mentioned by Pliny who says they were supported on inflated skins.

Beyond Avalites lay Malao (Berbera of later times), some eight thousand *stadia* by sea, and, as the *Periplus* tells us, a better 'market town'. The anchorage was an open roadstead, sheltered by a spit running out from the east; the inhabitants were more peaceable than those of Avalites who were very unruly. The

45. Pliny, XXXVI, 67; *vide* also Lucas, pp. 473-4; Salt, pp. 192-4.

46. *Periplus*, pp. 24-5.

imports, which were more or less the same as at Avalites, also included 'many tunics, cloaks from Arsinöe, dressed and dyed; drinking-cups, sheets of soft copper in small quantity, iron and gold and silver coin, not much'. The exports comprised myrrh, a little frankincense, known as 'far-side', the harder cinnamon, *duaca* (probably a kind of frankincense), Indian copal (a type of gum) and *macir* (a root-bark), which were imported into Arabia; and 'slaves, but rarely'. Pliny, too, refers to the export of myrrh at a port called Isis which must have been somewhere in this area.⁴⁷

Two or three days' sail to the east of Malao was the 'market town' of Mundus (Bandar Hais according to Schoff) where the ships lay at anchor more safely behind a projecting island close to the shore. Imports and exports were basically the same as at Malao, though an incense called *mocrotu* (probably a high grade of frankincense) was also exported. The traders, however, were said to be 'more quarrelsome'.⁴⁸

Another two or three days to the east lay the poor anchorage of Mosyllum (which Schoff believes to have been Ras Hantara). Beside the usual imports mention was made of silver plate, a very little iron, and glass; exports, on the other hand, included a great quantity of cinnamon (which, the *Periplus* comments, would have justified the use of larger ships), fragrant gums and spices, a little tortoise-shell, *mocrotu* of a poorer variety than at Mundus, frankincense, ivory and myrrh in small quantities. The export of cinnamon at this place is confirmed by Pliny.

A further two days to the east lay the Little Nile River (perhaps the Tokwina), a fine spring, a small laurel grove and Cape Elephant (Ras el Fill, forty miles west of Cape Guardafui). The shore then receded into a bay with a river called Elephant and a large laurel grove called Acannae (which Schoff identifies as Bandar Ululah) where the best grade of frankincense was procured in great quantity. Beyond this place the coast veered somewhat to the south toward the Market and Cape of Spices (Olok and Cape Guardafui respectively). The latter was an abrupt promontory at the very end of the Berber coast. Its anchorage was dangerous at times from the ground-swell because the place was exposed to the north. A sign of an approaching storm

47. *ibid.*, p. 25; Pliny, VI, 34.

48. *Periplus*, p. 26.

peculiar to the place was that the deep water became more turbid and changed colour. When this happened the ships made for a large promontory called Tabae (Ras Chenarif according to Schoff). Imports were the same as elsewhere along the coast, but exports consisted mainly of cinnamon (including the *gizir*, *asypha*, *arebo*, *magla* and *moto* varieties) and frankincense.⁴⁹ A further four hundred *stadia* to the south lay the village of Pano (Ras Binna, according to Schoff).

Even greater quantities of cinnamon, particularly of the *arebo* and *moto* types were obtained at Oponé four hundred *stadia* to the south (Ras Hafun, the distinctive headland on the Indian Ocean ninety miles south of Guardafui). The other exports of this place were 'the better sort of slaves', which were being brought to Egypt in increasing numbers, and a great quantity of tortoise-shell, of higher quality than that found elsewhere.⁵⁰

All these ports along the coast of the Horn of Africa were of international fame and were visited by vessels which either sailed there expressly or else exchanged their cargoes there while journeying along the neighbouring coast. Trading ships came both from Egypt whence they set forth every year in July, and from the ports between Ariaca and Barygaza on the north-west coast of the Indian sub-continent. These vessels brought the products of their own lands, such as wheat, rice, clarified butter, sesame oil, cotton cloth (the *monache* and the *sagmatogene*), girdles, and sugar, which the *Periplus* terms 'honey from the reed called *sacchari*'. This, it is interesting to observe, is believed to be the first occasion in history in which sugar is mentioned as an article of commerce.

To the south of the Horn of Africa lay the 'small and great bluffs of Azania' (identified by Schoff as the rugged coast of El Hazin ending at Ras el Kyl) which were 'destitute of harbours', though there were places where ships could lie at anchor as the shore was abrupt. Six days beyond them lay a 'small and great beach' (according to Schoff the Sif el Tauil or 'low coast' ending at Ras Aswad) which took a further six days to pass by before the traveller came at last to the Courses of Azania, and to the towns of Sarapion (Mogadishu?) and Nikon (Brava).

The *Periplus* thus covers the entire coast of the Horn of Africa

49. *ibid.*, p. 26.

50. *ibid.*, p. 27. *Vide* also Guillain, Vol. I, Part I, pp. 128-32.

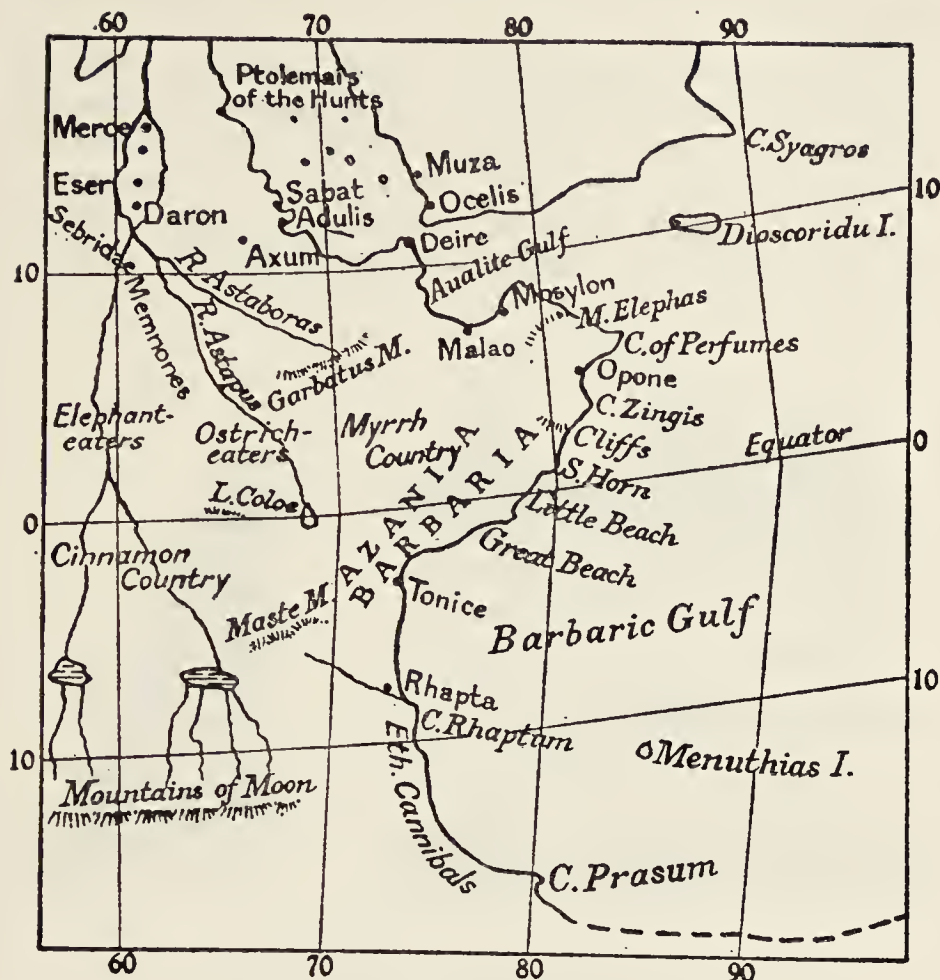


Map showing places mentioned in the *Periplus*, their modern equivalents, and imports and exports.

as far as the coast of Azania (probably southern Somaliland and Kenya) which region, it tells us, imported lances from Muza especially made for this trade, as well as hatchets, daggers and awls, various kinds of glass, and a little wine and wheat, 'not for trade, but to serve for getting the good-will of the savages'. The exports of these lands to the south of present-day Ethiopia included a little palm-oil and a great quantity of ivory, though inferior to that of Adulis, rhinoceros horn and tortoise-shell, which, the *Periplus* says, was second only to that of India.⁵¹

Trade between the Mediterranean world and the East continued to flourish in the centuries which followed. The Emperor

51. *Periplus*, p. 29.



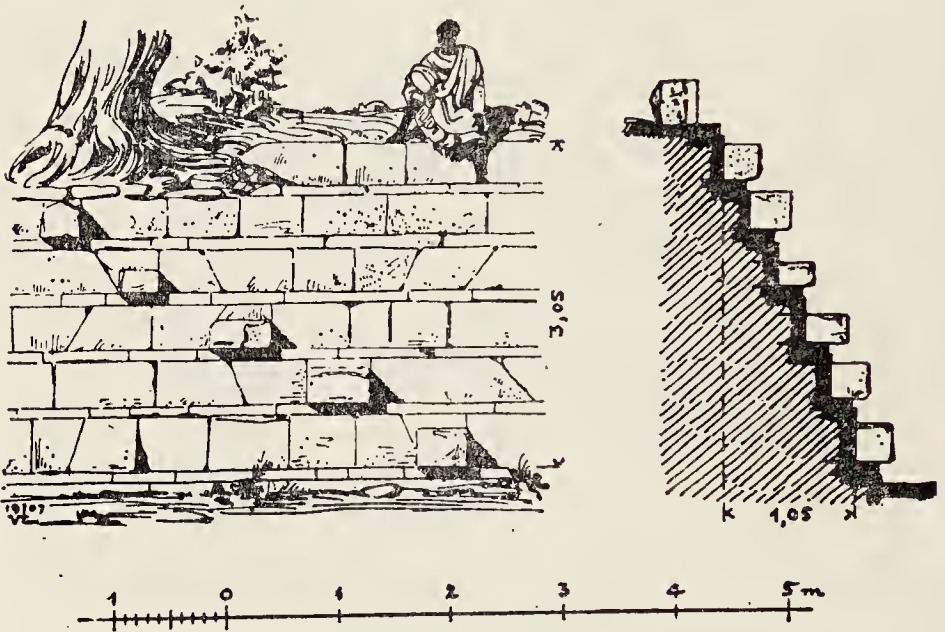
East Africa according to Ptolemy (c. A.D. 150).

From J. O. Thomson, *History of Ancient Geography*.

Trajan (53–117) cleared out the old canal which had silted up since Ptolemaic days and dug a new section at its western end to bring it to the Nile at the Egyptian port of Babylon, on the site of old Cairo, thus linking it with the western arm of the delta which led to Alexandria. He also reduced the vassal state of Nabataea on the eastern side of the Red Sea to a Roman province and constructed a road from the port of Aela at the mouth of the Gulf of Aqaba through Petra and Bostra to Damascus. Claudius Ptolemaeus (Ptolemy the geographer *c.* 150) therefore reveals a wider knowledge of the world beyond Suez than the

author of the *Periplus*, for the Greeks were now sailing as far as Ceylon.

Graeco-Egyptian knowledge of the Horn of Africa may be illustrated by the two sketch-maps here reproduced. The first indicates the places mentioned in the *Periplus* in the second half of the first century A.D. on the basis of the identifications of Schoff; the second is a reproduction of Professor J. Oliver Thomson's map of East Africa according to Ptolemy, i.e. about A.D. 150.



Detail of the dam at Kohaito.

From E. Littmann, D. Krencker, Th. Luepke and R. Zahn,
Deutsche Aksum-Expedition.

The Dam at Kohaito

One of the greatest engineering feats of the Aksumites was the erection of a dam at Kohaito for the formation of an artificial reservoir.⁵² The British explorer Theodore Bent, who inspected it in 1893, reports that it was 219 feet long; the central section, which had to sustain the greatest body of water, was 99 feet 4 inches long and very substantially built; it was made of fine

52. Bent, pp. 193, 218-9, 222.

mortarless stones the largest of which was 5 feet long and 1 foot $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches high. The piece of wall was flanked by two sluice gates, 5 feet 3 inches wide, on either side of which were two sections of wall, 46 feet 4 inches and 74 feet 6 inches long. Traces of ancient waterworks are also to be found at Aksum.

The Adulis Inscriptions

For our next brief glimpse of the Aksumite Empire we are indebted to the *Christian Topography* of Cosmas, a sixth-century Graeco-Roman merchant of Alexandria who was called Indicopleustes on account of his travels to India and who subsequently became a monk. Cosmas sailed extensively in the Red Sea and Indian Ocean and actually entered the Aksumite Empire on at least one occasion. He relates that on a visit to Adulis in about A.D. 523, during the reign of the famous Aksumite sovereign Ela Atsbeha (also known as Kaleb), he was requested by Abbas, the governor of the town, to assist in copying two inscriptions in the port, the order to effect this work having come from the sovereign himself. These texts, which were in Greek, were subsequently quoted by Cosmas in the *Christian Topography* upon whose account we have to rely as the original stone has since disappeared. One inscription – which has already been referred to – records the exploits of Ptolemy III of Egypt (247–222 B.C.) who had apparently established a trading station in the port. The other was carved on a chair of costly white marble at the back of which were sculptured figures of Hercules and Mercury. It stood ‘just as you enter the town on the western side by the road which leads to Aksum’ and described the expeditions of an Aksumite king who recorded his deeds in the twenty-seventh year of his reign.⁵³ The nameless sovereign, who was evidently not the founder of the Aksumite Empire but actively engaged in its consolidation, declared: ‘I first and alone of the kings of my race made these conquests.’ Then followed a brief account of his exploits which were conducted, he declared, to make the people ‘live in peace’.

In one of his first campaigns he penetrated the mountains ‘difficult of access and covered with snow (presumably a reference to the Semien range) where the year is all winter with hail storms,

53. Cosmas, pp. 59–66.

frosts and snows, into which a man sinks knee deep' and obliged many tribes to give him half of all they possessed.

In a later campaign he apparently passed through the lands of Mensa and Habab in western Eritrea and on to the borders of Egypt. Having subdued the inhabitants (of the territory watered by the Takaze and Atbara rivers), he made a 'footpath' from this part of his dominions to Egypt so as to encourage trade and communications.

In the following campaign he blockaded 'precipitous mountains', obliged his enemies to 'come down and surrender', and selected 'the best of their young men and their women, with their sons and daughters and all besides that they possessed'.

In his next campaign he appears to have fought against some of the nomads of the Somali region, for he states that he overcame 'a barbarous race spread over wide waterless plains' in the interior of the 'frankincense country'. Advancing to the sea he gave the inhabitants 'instructions to guard the coast', and restored their lands to them 'subject to the payment of tribute'.

In his last campaign he claims to have crossed the Red Sea to Arabia. 'I sent a fleet and land forces,' he declares, 'against the Arabitae and Cinaedocolpitaë, who dwelt on the other side of the Red Sea, and having reduced the Sovereigns of both, I imposed a land tribute and charged them to make travelling safe both by sea and by land. I thus subdued the whole coast from Leuce Come to the country of the Sabaeans.'

'For this success', concludes the author of the inscription, 'I now offer my thanks to my mighty God, Ares, who begat me, and by whose aid I reduced all the nations bordering on my own country, on the East to the country of frankincense, and on the West to Ethiopia and Sasu.⁵⁴ Of these expeditions, some were conducted by myself in person, and ended in victory, and the others I entrusted to my officers. Having thus brought all the world under my authority to peace I came down to Aduli(s) and offered sacrifice to Zeus, and to Ares and to Poseidon, whom I entreated to befriend all who go down to the sea in ships. Here

54. The location of Sasu is open to dispute. Harris equates it with Sousa, the ancient name of Kaffa, and Conti Rossini with the modern province of Wallega where a river of this name still exists; Heinrich Müller, on the other hand, identifies it with Sesea, a part of Somaliland and hence places it not to the West of Aksum but to its east. *Vide* Cosmas, pp. 65-6; Conti Rossini, p. 169.

also I reunited all my forces, and setting down this Chair in this place, I consecrated it to Ares in the twenty-seventh year of my reign.⁵⁵

This inscription throws much light on the conditions of the time and reveals the King's concern with trade and the pursuits of peace. The reference to the building of a road to Egypt suggests that overland trade with the west was of considerable significance, while the fact that the chair was erected on the coast indicates the importance attached to maritime commerce. Conti Rossini is doubtless correct in assuming that Adulis was now the port not only of Aksum but of lands much farther to the west, including in all probability the inland kingdom of Meroe which traded with Arabia by way of that port.⁵⁶

The inscription underlines furthermore the close ties between Aksum and the Hellenic world already indicated in the *Periplus*. Not only was the royal chronicle written in Greek but it was dedicated, as we have seen, to the Greek divinities, Zeus, the father of the gods, Ares, the god of war, and Poseidon, the sea god. The name Ethiopia was used, according to the practice of the Hellenes, to signify Nubia. The influence of the Greeks, who were mainly traders, was in fact so great as to leave a permanent imprint on the Ethiopic language which in this period borrowed the Greek numerals though subjecting them to some modification.⁵⁷

The identity of the victorious monarch mentioned above is not revealed by Cosmas. The Ethiopic scholars August Dillmann and Conti Rossini are both of the opinion that he was probably the immediate predecessor of Zoskales, mentioned in the *Periplus*, and that he lived in the first century A.D., but Enno Littmann, leader of the Deutsche Aksum-Expedition of 1905-1910 places the date of the inscription much later, at the end of the fourth century. The Arabist Spencer Trimingham points out that the royal inscriptions in South Arabia are interrupted for the years 300-378 and therefore suggests that this was probably a period of Aksumite rule on both sides of the Red Sea. The records of the Yamanite kings, it should be noted, resume in 378 and continue until the conquest of South Arabia by Kaleb in 524.⁵⁸

55. Cosmas, pp. 59-63.

56. Conti Rossini, p. 126; Arkell, p. 166.

57. Dillman, pp. 21, 33.

58. Rossini, p. 122; Trimingham, pp. 36-7.

At all events the Adulis inscription enables us to conclude that the Aksumite Empire was expanding in many directions and that under the King's encouragement trade flourished.

The Inscriptions of Ezana

More significant than the inscription at Adulis are those of the fourth-century monarch Ezana which were found at Aksum. They confirm the impression of a growing and prosperous empire. The first, which was written in Greek, Sabaean and Ethiopic (Ge'ez) suggests that the empire was now more extensive, for whereas the previous King only claimed to rule as far as the borders of the Sabaean realm, Ezana declared that his empire in Arabia included also Himyar, Raidan and Salhen. He stated that he sent his brothers, Shaiazana and Hadeban, against the Bega tribes to the north, who had rebelled against him. His brothers captured six chiefs there and brought them to Aksum with their men, women and children – 4,000 people in all – 3,112 cattle, 6,224 sheep and innumerable pack animals. During the four months' journey these prisoners were allowed rations to eat and drink 'to the full according to their number', receiving each day 22,000 loaves of *Ales* wheat,⁵⁹ as well as meat, water, wine and beer. On their arrival at Aksum they were given food and clothing in plenty; the six chiefs were then dressed and decorated according to their rank and dispatched with their people to a region called Duala Bairen (in the Greek text, Matlia), which Littmann considers may have been in Begemder. There they were settled on new land and supplied with a further 25,140 cattle. Well pleased with this remarkable operation Ezana concludes his record by noting that he had erected at Aksum five statues, one of gold, one of silver and three of copper. In the Ethiopic version it is stated that these statues are dedicated to three gods: Astar (sky), Meder (earth) and Mahrem(?),⁶⁰ the Sabaean text substitutes Beher (land or sea) for Meder⁶¹ while the Greek omits all reference to the gods.⁶¹

god of War-Ares

59. *Ales*, a type of wheat known as *spelt* or *emmer* in English, of the *triticum* species.

60. For a discussion of the possible meaning and significance of these names *vide* Conti Rossini, pp. 141–3, 148.

61. Littmann, *Deutsche Aksum-Expedition*, Vol. IV, pp. 4–17; Budge, Vol. I, pp. 245–6.

In a second inscription, written only in Ethiopic he describes an expedition which was probably in the lowlands because it mentions the use of camels for transport. Abba Alkeo(?), King of the Aguezat, came out with gifts to greet Ezana who collected camels and provisions for a journey of twenty days, but on the third day he discovered treachery on the part of Abba Alkeo, and reduced him to submission. He then marched on to many other districts and established order.⁶²

In a third inscription he states that he campaigned against the Tsarene⁶³ in the district of Afan(?) who had massacred a commercial caravan.⁶⁴

In a fourth inscription he records a campaign in the south-west from which he returned to Aksum through the lofty mountains of Semien(?). He relates that he proceeded to the Elabaha and presented gifts to the Kings of the Aguezat and the Sausauat and also to their people, giving them laws and regulations. He then marched on to Fantsahat, where he gave laws and regulations to the Gabaza and Sabala peoples. He passed next to Hamasha and there imposed civil government. He constructed roads and promised security. In Semien also he regulated the tribes. Everywhere on his march, we are told, he received homage and gifts, and many were the tribes who asked him to give them laws.⁶⁵

In his last inscription, which incidentally reveals his conversion to the Christian faith, he records that he marched against the Noba (Nubians), who lived on the southern side of the Takaze, and also against the Kasu (who inhabited the region which had formed the kingdom of Meroe).⁶⁶ The Noba, it is stated, had been under the rule of Aksum, but had rebelled 'and made boast of it', saying that the forces of Aksum would never cross the Takaze to punish them. They had accordingly broken the peace, attacking and robbing their neighbours and stripping bare the messengers whom he had sent to inquire into these thefts. 'I had sent warnings to them,' he declares, 'but they would not hearken to me; they refused to cease their evil deeds and heaped abuse upon me and then betook themselves to flight.' He therefore marched

62. Littmann, Vol. IV, pp. 24-8; Budge, Vol. I, p. 246.

63. Littmann suggests that the word Tsarene may in fact not be a proper name but mean the 'enemy' or 'destroyer'.

64. Littmann, Vol. IV, pp. 28-32; Budge, Vol. I, pp. 248-9.

65. Littmann, Vol. IV, pp. 18-24; Conti Rossini, p. 135.

66. For a discussion of Ezana's campaign in Meroe, see also Arkell, pp. 171-3.

against them and fought them on the Takaze at the ford of Kemalke. His soldiers burnt their towns built of brick and reeds, destroying their temples and cotton plantations, and seizing their copper, iron and brass. The inscription ends with Ezana's pledge : 'I will rule the people with righteousness and justice, and will not oppress them, and may they preserve this Throne which I have set up for the Lord of Heaven.'⁶⁷ This inscription, it should be noted, constitutes clear proof of the antiquity of cotton cultivation in the area of the lower Takaze.

Aksumite Currency

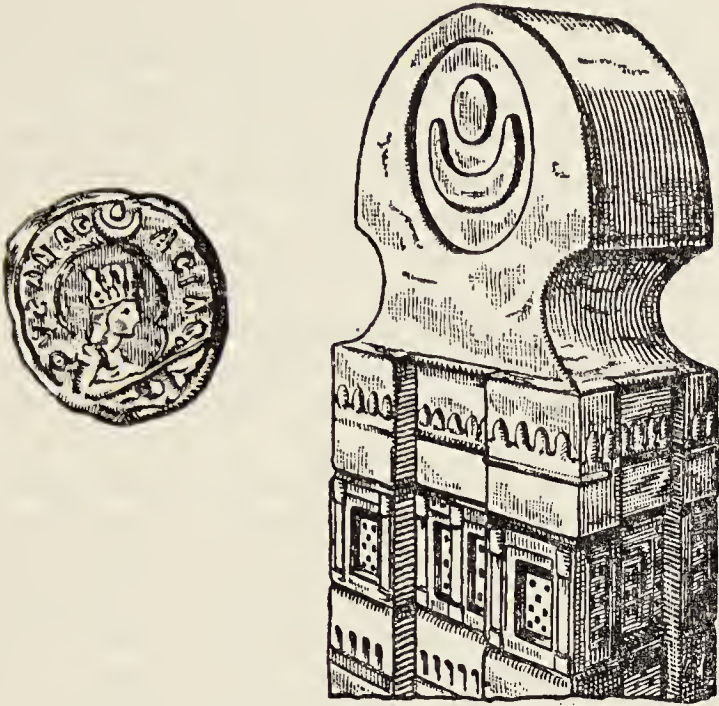
Numismatic research amplifies the information yielded by these inscriptions. It is generally believed that the first coins were minted by King Endybis or King Aphilas probably in the second half of the third century A.D. and that Aksumite currency continued to be issued for the next six or seven centuries. It would appear safe to assume that the golden age of Aksumite civilization coincided with this period. Some 513 different types of Aksumite currency are listed by the French author A. Kammerer of which 173 are in gold, 18 in silver and 322 in bronze. The coins carry neither dates nor the year of the monarch's reign. Their inscriptions are limited to the name of the king, his title, such as 'King of the Aksumites', occasionally the name of his father and, more rarely, what is thought to be the race from which he was descended.⁶⁸ They also sometimes contain, especially in the later period, a brief legend such as 'may it please the people', 'by the grace of God', 'he will conquer in Christ' or 'Christ is with us'.⁶⁹

The earliest money of Aphilas is small and light in weight; his later gold coins, however, are larger and heavier. Conti Rossini suggests that the lighter issue, which seems to bear the representa-

67. Littmann, Vol. IV, pp. 32-42; Budge, Vol. I, p. 249-258.

68. Mr. Stephen Wright, of Addis Ababa, suggests that scholars are probably mistaken in believing that some of the coins indicate the race of the sovereign. He argues that the Geez word *bisi* (powerful, or dominating) usually translated as meaning 'of the race of' might well be used in relation to the King's horse in the same way that Ethiopians of much later times used the word *Aba*. Sahle Sellassie, for example, was often known as *Aba Dina* (*Dina* being the name of his favourite horse). Theodore II was similarly referred to as *Aba Tataq*, Yohannes IV as *Aba Bazbez*, Menelik II as *Aba Dañaw*, and Ras Makonnen as *Aba Qañaw*.

69. See Appendices B and C.



Coin of Ousanas and detail of Aksumite obelisk showing use of the same emblems, sun and moon.

From A. Kammerer,
La Mer Rouge, l'Abyssinie et l'Arabie.

tion of a tree like the Candelabra Euphorbia, was made to conform with the Roman coins of the period, while the heavier coins, which bear representations of the sun and the moon, and appear in Arabian style, were devised because of Ezana's conquest of Arabia which occurred at the time; the South Arabians, it is argued, were accustomed to coins bearing these emblems and might be expected to take readily to the Aksumite currency if it incorporated them in its design.⁷⁰

Pagan signs are to be found on coins issued before the reign of Ezana, as well as on eleven different types issued by him; twelve of his later coins, however, bear the symbol of the cross, as do those of subsequent rulers. The coins of Ezana thus confirm the impression obtained from his inscriptions that he was the first Christian king of Aksum.

An examination of the coins reveals once again the close

70. Conti Rossini, pp. 128-30.

connection between Ethiopia and the Hellenic world which was maintained throughout almost the entire period of the currency. Sixteen Aksumite kings had their currency inscribed exclusively in Greek and two others used Greek as well as Ethiopic. These facts are testimony not only to the influence of Byzantium in the oriental world, as Kammerer observed, but also to the commercial supremacy of the Greeks in the Red Sea and Eastern Mediterranean region.⁷¹ The rulers of Aksum were presumably anxious to produce a currency which would be acceptable in foreign trade and this consideration justified the use of a language incomprehensible to the bulk of the population who, as we shall see, in any case also employed other articles of exchange such as salt and iron.

Currency inscribed in Greek tends to predominate in the early period when ties with the Hellenic world were strong, while Ethiopic becomes more usual in later years. Fourteen out of the first 16 kings employ Greek alone while only 2 use Ethiopic. Of the remaining 8 rulers, 4 use Ethiopic only, 2 use Ethiopic to a considerably greater extent than Greek and only 2 use Greek entirely.

It will be observed (in Appendix A) that with the exception of King Wazeba's gold currency, which was in Ethiopic, all other coins in that language were made of bronze, while gold and silver currency was normally inscribed in Greek. King Joel issued 17 types of bronze coin in Ethiopic and 2 of gold in Greek, while King Gersem struck 3 kinds of Greek language coin in gold and 2 kinds of Ethiopic coin in bronze. Greek therefore served for currency of high denomination which was probably mainly used for international trade as foreign merchants could not be expected to be familiar with the local language; Ethiopic, on the other hand, was the normal language for smaller coins which were presumably intended for use inside the country.

Most of the Aksumite coins thus far discovered were unearthed in the region of Aksum itself, on the coast near Adulis by the Italian Roberto Paribeni, and across the Red Sea in the Yaman, which, as we shall see, was temporarily under Aksumite rule.⁷² Smaller finds have also been made at Halai and Mai Turub in Eritrea, while a few coins were discovered at Hawara

71. Kammerer, *La Mer Rouge*, Vol. I, p. 224.

72. Kammerer, *Essai sur l'Histoire Antique*, pp. 136-8; Paribeni, *passim*.

and Qua-el-Kebir in upper Egypt.⁷³ As far as the present writer is aware scarcely any Aksumite coins have been found south of the city. This may be due to the absence of systematic archaeological research, though it is perhaps significant that no Aksumite currency came to light when large hoards of Chinese and other coins were unearthed in recent years on the Somali coast.

The Conversion to Christianity

Though it is widely thought that Christianity reached Ethiopia at the time of the Apostles and that 'many believed' it did not become the State religion until the reign of Ezana in the first half of the fourth century. In the words of the German scholar Ludolphus (1624-1704), a pioneer of Ethiopic studies, 'Ethiopian, Grecian and Latin authors agree with one consent that the conversion of the Ethiopians happened in the time of St. Athanasius, Patriarch of Alexandria, about the year of Christ A.D. 330 or not long after.'⁷⁴

The fourth century theologian Rufinus Tyrannius, records that Meropius, a Christian merchant, or as he calls him, 'a philosopher of Tyre', made a voyage to India, taking with him two boys whom he was educating in humane studies, the elder Frumentius, the younger Aedesius. On the return journey the ship put in for water at a harbour⁷⁵ on the coast of the Red Sea, but was seized as a reprisal against the Eastern Roman Empire which was said to have broken a treaty with the people of that coast. Meropius was slain. Rufinus declares that the boys were found studying under a tree, preparing their lessons, and 'preserved by the mercy of the barbarians', were taken to the King. He made Aedesius his cup-bearer and Frumentius, whom he perceived to be sagacious and prudent, his treasurer and secretary. Thereafter these two Syrians were held in great honour and affection by the King, and were known in the country as Fremonatus and Adesyos or Sydracus. The King died soon afterwards leaving his wife with an infant son as heir of the bereaved kingdom. He had given the young men liberty to leave the

73. Anzani, *Numismatica e Storia d'Etiopia*, *passim*.

74. Ludolphus, *A New History of Ethiopia*, p. 250.

75. The location of this place of landing is uncertain. Budge, Vol. I, p. 148, suggests that it was Adulis, but it was more likely to have been a nearby roadstead.

country if they wished, but the Queen besought them with tears, since she had no more faithful subjects in the whole kingdom, to share with her the cares of government till her son should grow up, especially Frumentius, whose ability was equal to guiding the kingdom – for the other, though loyal of heart, was simple.

Frumentius meanwhile sought out those of the ‘Roman merchants’, i.e. Levantines or Greeks, who were Christians and urged them ‘to establish conventicles in various places to which they might resort for prayer’. He provided them with ‘whatever was needed, supplying sites for buildings and in every way promoting the growth of the seed of Christianity in the country’.

When the young heir came of age, Aedesius returned to Tyre, while Frumentius journeyed to Alexandria, perhaps the most important centre of Christianity at the time, where he informed the great Patriarch Athanasius of the work so far accomplished for Christianity in Ethiopia. He begged him ‘to look for some worthy man to send as bishop over the many Christians already congregated’. Athanasius, ‘having carefully weighed and considered the words and deeds of Frumentius, declared in a council of priests: “What other man shall we find in whom the Spirit of God is as in thee who can accomplish these things?” And he consecrated him and bade him return in the Grace of God whence he had come’. Accordingly Frumentius returned to Ethiopia as her first Christian bishop.

‘These facts’, says Rufinus, ‘I know, not from vulgar report, but from the mouth of Aedesius himself, who had been the companion of Frumentius and was later made a priest in Tyre.’

The account of Rufinus appears to corroborate the Ethiopian tradition that Christianity was introduced by two brothers by name Abraha and Atzbeha. It may be assumed that the king who first welcomed the two Syrian youths was Ella Amida who is listed in the Ethiopian chronicles, and that his widow, the Queen Regent, was Thywa whose regal name was Sofya. Her young son, who accepted Frumentius of Tyre as Christian bishop and established Christianity as the State religion, was none other than the Ezana of the Aksumite inscriptions and currency. Ezana’s brother Shaiazana, it will be recalled, had been sent on an important expedition to the north-west. On adopting the new faith Ezana seems to have been baptized Abraha (‘he who illuminated’), while Shaiazana was renamed Atzbeha (‘he who

brought the dawn'). Frumentius, too, was given an appropriate new name: Abba Salama ('father of peace').⁷⁶

It is interesting to note that Constantius, the Emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire who supported a Christian faction opposed to Athanasius, wrote to the two brothers in A.D. 356 addressing them as his 'precious brothers' Ezana and Shaiazana and warning them against Athanasius, who, he feared, would come to Aksum 'to corrupt the people with his accursed doctrines'.⁷⁷

The arrival of Frumentius had profound consequences for Ethiopia. Conti Rossini suggests that Syrian merchants were active at this time in Adulis as in many parts of the East, and that the Syrians thus made their impact alike in the fields of religion and commerce. In support of this view he cites a number of Ge'ez words listed below which were probably borrowed from

<i>Religious</i>		<i>Commercial</i>	
<i>arami</i>	pagan	<i>'elwa</i>	aloes
<i>'arb</i>	Friday	<i>komat</i>	drinking vessel
<i>hanafi</i>	pagan	<i>yaqent</i>	hyacinth
<i>haymanot</i>	religion	<i>zamaragd</i>	emerald
<i>hati'at</i>	sin	<i>aklil</i>	crown
<i>hat'a</i>	he lacked goodness	<i>iton</i>	furnace
<i>takannsa</i>	he prepared a body for a funeral service	<i>gawz</i>	nut
<i>mahaymen</i>	believer	<i>geyera</i>	he covered the house with mud
<i>mal'ak</i>	angel	<i>hamelat</i>	a kind of coat
<i>malakot</i>	divinity	<i>hanot</i>	shop
<i>masih</i>	Messiah	<i>lawz</i>	almond tree
<i>mazmur</i>	psalm	<i>roman</i>	pomegranate
<i>zamara</i>	he sang	<i>siray</i>	silk cloth
<i>qasis</i>	priest	<i>zayt</i>	oil
<i>qobe</i>	priest or monk's cap		
<i>qurban</i>	Eucharist		
<i>tsalot</i>	prayer		
<i>tsallaya</i>	he prayed		
<i>tatsalba</i>	he was crucified		
<i>tsanatsel</i>	sistrum		

76. Pankhurst, p. 57.

77. Conti Rossini, p. 149-50. For a discussion of alternative (European) theories of the conversion to Christianity, *vide* Pankhurst, pp. 57-8 and for supporting evidence from Ethiopian sources, *vide* Conti Rossini, pp. 151-4.

Syriac at this time though some may in fact merely have a common Semitic root.⁷⁸

He also claims to discern Syrian influence in the transcription of Greek sounds into Ethiopic.⁷⁹

The Christian Topography

The visit to Adulis of Cosmas Indicopleustes, the Graeco-Byzantine trader of Alexandria to whom reference has already been made, occurred about A.D. 523. It is described in the *Christian Topography* which Cosmas wrote in later life on becoming a monk. The object of this work was to prove that the world was not spherical but flat and oblong. Though largely theological in character, it devotes considerable attention to Ethiopia, and other parts of the East, giving us an impression of the economic and social conditions of the Aksumite realm as well as adding to the geographical and historical information provided by the *Periplus*. The country is described as an integral part of the Eastern Christian world, frequented by Greek and Byzantine traders of the Middle East, and having commercial intercourse not only with the Yaman, but also with countries as far away as Persia, India and Ceylon.

The Aksumite Empire had developed considerably since the time of the *Periplus* half a millennium earlier. The advent of Christianity now made it possible for Cosmas to declare that 'in Ethiopia and Axom' (Aksum) as well as in 'Arabia and Palestine, Phoenicia, and all Syria and Antioch as far as Mesopotamia . . . there are everywhere churches of the Christians, and bishops, martyrs, monks and recluses, where the Gospel of Christ is proclaimed'. The same was true, he added, among the Nubians and many of the peoples of Egypt, Libya and North Africa.⁸⁰

The Aksumite realm, which was thus surrounded by co-religionists to the north, east and west, was also linked to the outside world by extensive bonds of trade. Cosmas relates that Adulis, 'the port of the Axomites' two miles from the shore, was 'much frequented' by traders from Alexandria and the Elanitic Gulf (Gulf of Aqaba), and that he had also found there Greek-

78. Conti Rossini, p. 155. *Vide* also Noldeke, *passim*.

79. Conti Rossini, p. 156.

80. Cosmas, p. 120.

speaking people from the island of Dioscorides (Sokotra) at the mouth of the Gulf of Aden.⁸¹ The commerce of the Aksumite Empire stretched even farther afield for he states that Ethiopia abounded in large tusked elephants which it exported 'even into India and Persia and the Homerite country (Arabia) and the Roman dominion'⁸² (i.e. the Eastern Roman Empire). The island of Taprobane (Ceylon) was also 'much frequented', he says, by ships from Ethiopia, as well as from India and Persia; 'men from Adule' (Adulis) exported their produce there and brought back Ceylonese goods in exchange, and probably also pepper from the Malabar coast.⁸³

Adulis seems also to have enjoyed a flourishing trade in emeralds from Nubia for Cosmas declares: 'The Ethiopians who procure this stone from the Blemmyes in Ethiopia (i.e. the Nubia area) take it to India, and with the price it fetches, they invest in wares of great value. All these matters I have described and explained partly from personal observation, and partly from accurate inquiries which I made when in the neighbourhood of the different places.'⁸⁴

Confirmation of the widespread foreign trade of Adulis is to be found in George Hourani's monograph on Arab seafaring in ancient and medieval times. Describing the port as 'the main commercial centre of exchange between the Byzantine Empire and the countries of the Indian Ocean, he quotes the following verse of Mu'allaqat of Tarafah, a sixth-century poet of Hirah in Mesopotamia, which indicates that vessels of Adulis were known across the Red Sea: 'When the lady of Malik rides her camel at dawn her litter appears like a large ship of Dad, one of the ships of Adulis or ibn Yamin, which the mariner now turns aside and now directs ahead; its prow cuts through the foam of the water as a gambler divides the dust with his hand.'⁸⁵

The Byzantine historian Procopius, writing a decade or so later than Cosmas, gives a little supplementary data on the Aksumite port which, he says, was separated from the boundaries of the Roman Empire by a distance which took the unencumbered traveller thirty days to traverse.⁸⁶ He observes that the Aethiopians and Homeritae (Himyarites) lived on opposite sides

81. *ibid.*, pp. 54, 119.

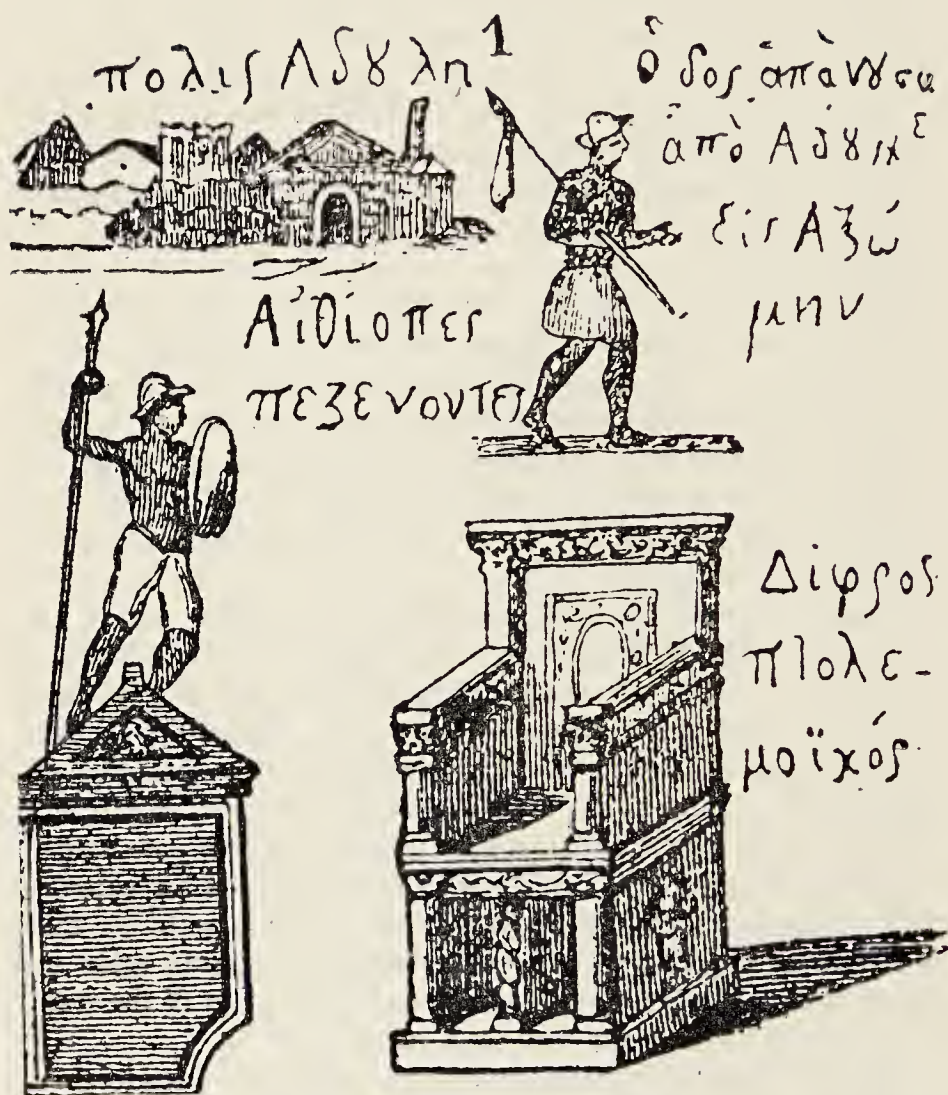
82. *ibid.*, p. 372.

83. *ibid.*, pp. 365-6, 368.

84. *ibid.*, p. 371.

85. Hourani, pp. 3, 42.

86. Procopius, I, xix, 28.



Adulis as seen by Cosmas in the sixth century.

Upper, left: The city; *Upper, right:* An Ethiopian travelling from the port to Aksum. *Lower, left:* The tablet with the Greek inscription, which Cosmas copied, surmounted by the figure of Ptolemy Euergetes. *Lower, right:* Chair erected by an Aksumite sovereign.

From J. W. McCrindle, *The Christian Topography of Cosmas*.

of the Red Sea, that the principal ports on either coast were Adulis and Bulicas, that if there was a moderately favourable wind the journey between them could be made in five days, and that it was safe to travel by night as there was no danger of shoals. The city of Adulis, he states, was twenty *stadia*, i.e. two miles, from the harbour of that name and the city of Aksum a further twelve days' journey inland.⁸⁷ The boats of these parts, were not made in the same manner as European ships; their planks were neither smeared with pitch to make them watertight nor held together with iron nails but bound with a kind of cord. This was not, as generally supposed, because there were magnetic rocks which drew out the nails, but because 'the Indians and the Ethiopians' possessed 'neither iron⁸⁸ nor any other thing suitable for such purposes', and were unable to buy them from the Romans as this was explicitly forbidden by law, anyone caught violating this prohibition being punished by death.⁸⁹

Like the author of the *Periplus* Cosmas mentions a considerable trade in frankincense and other commodities from the Somali coast which he refers to as 'the frankincense country called Barbaria'. Reviewing the geography of this region he remarks that it lay 'along the ocean, and not near but at a great distance from the land of Sasu which is the remotest part of Ethiopia'.⁹⁰ 'The region which produces frankincense,' he adds, 'is situated at the projecting parts of Ethiopia, and lies inland, but is washed by the ocean on the other side. Hence the inhabitants of Barbaria, being near at hand, go up into the interior and, engaging in traffic with the natives, bring back from them many kinds of spices, frankincense, *cassia*,⁹¹ *calamus*,⁹² and many other articles of merchandise, which they afterwards send by sea to Adule, to the country of the Homerites, to Further India, and to Persia.' 'The Homerites,' he later explains, 'are not far distant from Barbaria, as the sea which lies between them can be crossed in a couple of days, and then beyond Barbaria is the ocean which is there called Zingion. The country known as that

87. *ibid.*, I, xix, 17-22.

88. Iron did in fact exist in many parts of Ethiopia.

89. *ibid.*, I, xix, 23-6.

90. Cosmas, p. 51.

91. A kind of bark similar to that of cinnamon. See p. 6-7 for a discussion on the source of this article.

92. An aromatic rush.

of Sasu is itself near the ocean, just as the ocean is near the frankincense country.'

Most of the slaves in the hands of merchants, he elsewhere relates, were taken from these same two regions, Barbaria and Sasu.⁹³ Stephanus of Byzantium, a contemporary and compatriot of Procopius, confirms this general picture of foreign trade, stating that the land of the Abaseni, or Abyssinians, yielded myrrh, frankincense, aloes, cinnamon and a red vegetable dye.⁹⁴

Though relatively less well informed about the interior of the Horn of Africa, Cosmas suggests that the 'King of the Axomites' showed considerable interest in trade and particularly in the many gold mines, for gold, salt and iron were apparently the principal articles of currency in his country. Intrigued by the somewhat unusual manner in which the gold was said to be obtained from the people of Sasu our author describes the matter at length. He states that under the auspices of the governor of Agao,⁹⁵ the king sent officers there every other year who were normally accompanied by as many as five hundred private traders. The latter took advantage of the greater security afforded by the expedition to travel on their own account.

'They take along with them to the mining district,' Cosmas continues, 'oxen, and lumps of salt and iron, and when they reach its neighbourhood they make a halt at a certain spot and form an encampment which they fence round with a great hedge of thorns. Within this they live, and having slaughtered the oxen, cut them in pieces, and lay the pieces on the top of the thorns, along with the lumps of salt and iron. Then come the natives bringing gold in nuggets like peas, called *tancharas*, and lay one or two or more of these upon what pleases them – the pieces of flesh or the salt or the iron, and then they retire to some distance off. Then the owner of the meat approaches, and if he is satisfied he takes the gold away, and upon seeing this its owner comes and takes the flesh or the salt or the iron. If, however, he is not satisfied he leaves the gold, when the native, seeing that he has not taken it, comes and either puts down more gold or takes up what he has laid down and goes away. Such is the mode in which business is transacted with the people of that country because

93. *ibid.*, pp. 51–2, 67.

94. Schoff, pp. 34, 137, 145.

95. Presumably a region inhabited by the Agaos.

their language is different and interpreters are hardly to be found.

'The time they stay in that country is five days more or less, according as the natives more or less readily come forward to buy up all their wares. On the journey homeward they all agree to travel well-armed, since some of the tribes through whose country they may pass might threaten to attack them from a desire to rob them of their gold. The space of six months is taken up with this trading expedition, including both the going and the returning. In going they march very slowly, chiefly because of the cattle, but in returning they quicken their pace lest on the way they should be overtaken by winter⁹⁶ and its rains. For the sources of the River Nile lie somewhere in these parts, and in winter, on account of the heavy rains, the numerous rivers which they generate obstruct the path of the traveller. The people there have their winter at the time we have our own summer. It begins in the month Epiphi of the Egyptians and continues till Thoth (i.e. from July to September), and during three months the rains fall in torrents, and makes a multitude of rivers all of which flow into the Nile.'⁹⁷

No other traveller mentions the existence of this type of 'dumb commerce' or 'silent trade' as it is called, in any part of Ethiopia, though there is evidence that it was practised both in ancient and modern times in many other parts of Africa.⁹⁸

Cosmas makes explicit references to his sojourn in Ethiopia in a curious chapter on animals in which he mentions the country's wild life and its utilization. The Ethiopians, he states, differed from the Indians in considering elephants only as a source of ivory; they did not understand the art of taming them, though if their king wished to have one or two for show they captured them when young and trained them.⁹⁹

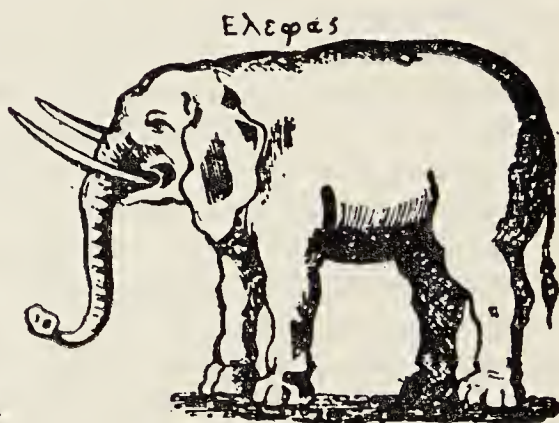
He relates that he once saw a live rhinoceros in Ethiopia as well as the skin of a dead one stuffed with chaff, which stood in the royal palace. The horns of this 'altogether fearful animal', were 'mobile', but when it saw anything to move its rage, it erected them whereupon they became rigid and 'strong enough to tear up even trees by the roots'. This animal was 'somehow hostile to the elephant' whose feet and skin closely resembled its

96. The reference is to the rainy season which in fact occurs in the summer.

97. Cosmas, pp. 52-4.

98. *ibid.*, p. 52 n; Quiggin, pp. 11-12.

99. Cosmas, p. 372.

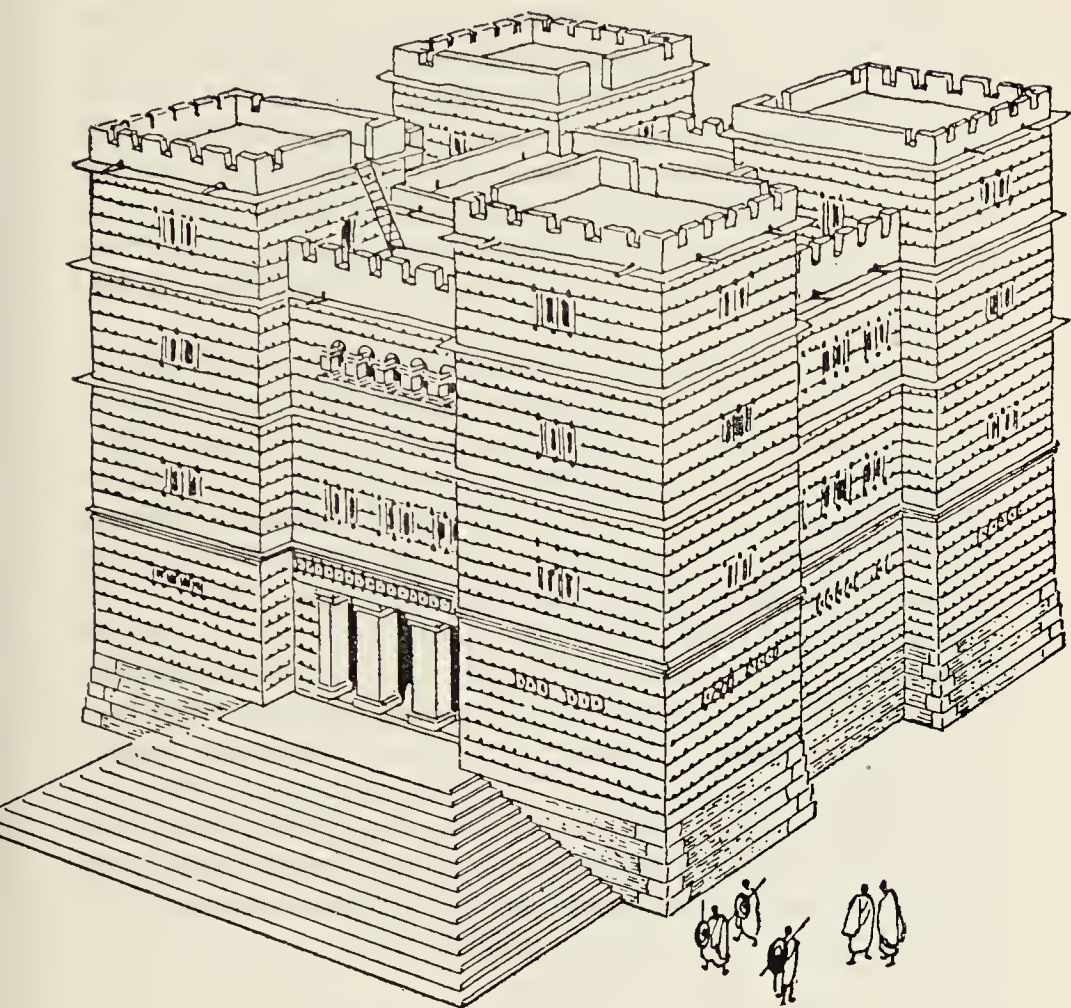


Ethiopian animals as depicted by Cosmas in the sixth century:

Rhinoceros.
Giraffe.
Unicorn.

Taurelaphus.
Hippopotamus.
Elephant.

From J. W. McCrindle, *The Christian Topography of Cosmas*.



Reconstruction of the palace of Enda Mikael in Aksum.
 From E. Littmann, D. Krencker, Th. Luepke and R. Zahn,
Deutsche Aksum Expedition.

own. When dried its skin was four inches thick and was used by some people instead of iron for ploughshares. The creature was therefore called by the Ethiopians *Arou* (*arwe*) *Harisi* (*haris*). 'By *arou* they designate the beast as such, and by *arisi*, ploughing, giving him this name from his shape about the nostrils, and also from the use to which his hide is turned.'^{100 101}

100. The validity of this derivation is dubious.

101. *ibid.*, p. 359.

Ethiopian giraffes, the only ones he had ever seen or heard of, were, he reports, 'wild creatures and undomesticated' though a few which had been caught when young, were tamed and kept at the palace for the king's amusement. 'When milk or water to drink is set before these creatures in a pan, as is done in the king's presence, they cannot, by reason of the great length of their legs and the height of their breast and neck, stoop down to the earth and drink unless by straddling with their forelegs. They must, therefore, it is plain, in order to drink, stand with their forelegs wide apart.'¹⁰²

Cosmas also mentions the Ethiopian taurelaphus or ox-deer, which, he states, had not been domesticated like that of India.¹⁰¹ Hippopotamus teeth were plentiful in both Ethiopia and Egypt according to Cosmas and were an article of trade in Alexandria.¹⁰³ He had never seen the fabulous Monoceros or unicorn, though he adds: 'I have seen four brazen figures of him set up in the four-towered palace of the King of Ethiopia.' This building was probably the ruined edifice, a reconstruction of which by Krencker of the German Aksum expedition is here reproduced. The animal, Cosmas concludes, was spoken of as 'a terrible beast and quite invincible'. 'They say', he reports credulously, 'that all his strength lies in his horn. When he finds himself pursued by many hunters and on the point of being caught, he springs up to the top of some precipice whence he throws himself down and in the descent turns a somersault so that the horn sustains all the shock of the fall, and he escapes unhurt.'¹⁰⁴

Aksumite Control of South Arabia

Cosmas declared that he visited the Aksumite realm at the beginning of the reign of Justinus I of the Eastern Roman Empire (518-527) when King Ela Atsbeha, or Kaleb (514-543), was preparing an expedition against the Himyarites on the opposite side of the Red Sea.¹⁰⁵ This appears to have been the first of several expeditions which are mentioned at length in semi-contemporary Byzantine, Syrian, Arabic and South Arabian records.¹⁰⁶

102. *ibid.*, pp. 358-9.

103. *ibid.*, pp. 361-2.

104. *ibid.*, p. 360-1.
105. *ibid.*, p. 55.
106. Procopius I, xx, 1-8; Conti Rossini, pp. 171-9; Pereira, *Historia dos Martyres de Nagrau, passim*; Budge, Vol. I, p. 262; Vasiliev, pp. 16 n, 297 n.

Though these accounts vary in detail they tally on some of the most important points. From them it is apparent that the Christians of the Yaman, who were apparently both natives of the country and traders from foreign lands, were in bitter conflict with the Jews and Pagans who are described by Procopius as 'rascals' holding in reverence 'the old faith which men of the present day call Hellenic'. The ruler of the Himyarites, who in some accounts is called Masruk, joined in the persecution of the Christians which so incensed Kaleb, whom Procopius describes as 'a Christian and a most devoted adherent of the faith', that he collected a fleet of ships and an army, came against them and conquered them in battle.

The ruler of the Himyarites, being unable to defend his capital, appears to have resorted to a stratagem of some kind to persuade Kaleb and the greater part of his army to return home; then, gaining courage from the reduced size of the Ethiopian garrison which remained in the country and profiting from the rainy season when contact between Aksum and the Yaman was most difficult, he easily seized control.

The Himyarites, led by a ruler who is variously known as Dhu Nuwas, Dhu Iazan and Yusuf, intensified their persecution of the Christians, particularly at the city of Nagran where a certain noble called Harith – later known as St. Arethas – and a very large number of his co-religionists were murdered in November 523. The survivors appealed to both Justinus and Kaleb. The Eastern Roman Emperor being too far away requested the Aksumite sovereign to intervene and may have facilitated his acquisition of the necessary fleet. A sixth-century Greek text *The Martyrdom of St. Arethas* states that Kaleb transported a victorious army of 120,000 men across the Red Sea, using some 60 vessels which he had collected at Gabazas (probably Gamez, near Adulis).¹⁰⁷ Of these boats 15 came from Aela, 7 from Iotabe (the modern island of Tiran), respectively to the north and south of the Gulf of Aqaba, 20 from Clysmā at the innermost point of the Gulf of Suez, 2 from Berenice farther south along the Egyptian Red Sea coast, 7 from the island of Farasan off the Arabian shore to the north of the Yaman, and 9 from India; a

¹⁰⁷. Al Masudi, writing in 935, states that the Ethiopian fleet sailed from Nasi (Massawa?) and Zeila. De Meynard and de Courteille, Vol. III, p. 157. Littmann, Vol. IV, p. 22.

further 10 seem to have been locally built at Adulis on the Indian pattern.

After his victory Kaleb appointed an Ethiopian viceroy to administer the conquered territory and returned to Africa where he thanked God for his success and renounced the throne, sending his crown to Jerusalem with a request that it be hung in front of the Holy Sepulchre. He then retired to a monastery where he lived to the end of his days in great austerity.

The conquest of Southern Arabia placed the Aksumite realm among the great powers of the day and made a considerable impact on the Middle East. From this period dates the erection of the church of Marib at Sana, which Professor Hitti describes as 'one of the most magnificent cathedrals of the age'. This edifice, which was destroyed some two centuries later, was called by the Arabs *al Qaalis* after the Greek *ekklesia*, a church; according to Arab tradition it was built by Byzantine craftsmen and artists sent by the Emperor of the Roman Empire.¹⁰⁸

Aksumite suzerainty in Arabia appears to have waned in the reign of Kaleb's son, Gabra Masqal (c. 550-580). The Ethiopian viceroy Abraha is said to have become largely independent of his overlord across the Red Sea though he still paid him nominal tribute.¹⁰⁹

The importance of the Aksumite realm at this time is underlined by Procopius who relates that the great Justinian (527-565), the successor of Justinus who had ruled the Eastern Roman Empire at the time of Kaleb's conquest, sent his ambassador Julianus in 531 to the Ethiopians and to the Himyarites, who were apparently self-governing though still nominally under Aksumite rule, asking them to make common cause with their co-religionists, the Romans, in their war against the Persians. He proposed that the Ethiopians should buy silk from India and sell it to the Romans, declaring that they would thereby gain much profit for themselves, and assist the Romans by saving them from having to pay their money to the Persians. The Himyarites were further requested to invade Persia. Both rulers agreed in principle, but failed to carry out these demands. The Ethiopians found it impossible in practice to buy the required silks from the Indians, as the Persian merchants in the harbours farther to the east,

108. Conti Rossini, pp. 182-3; Hitti, p. 63.

109. Procopius I, xx, 1-13; Conti Rossini, p. 181 *et passim*.



King Yekuno Amlak (1270-1285), the first sovereign of the restored Solomonic line. (From a late eighteenth century MS., British Museum Orient 503.)



The King sits on the throne under the royal umbrella playing the bagana, or harp. The Ethiopian artist in depicting the Biblical King David, imagined him as an Ethiopian Christian monarch with Ethiopian cross and crown. This illustration, and the others, taken from manuscripts are religious in theme, but have been selected for the light they throw on the Ethiopian scene. (From an eighteenth century MS., British Museum Orient 635.)

where the Indian ships first put in, bought up whole cargoes thereby monopolizing the entire supply; the Himyarites, for their part, are said to have considered it impossible to cross the deserts which lay between them and the Persians and then to go into battle against a people more warlike than themselves. Procopius states that Abraha promised Justinian many times to attack Persia, but 'only once began the journey and then immediately turned back'.¹¹⁰ Twenty years later the problem of obtaining silk from the East was solved as far as the Byzantine Empire was concerned by the introduction of silkworms brought secretly overland from China. Nonnonus, a later ambassador sent by Justinian to the Aksumites, reported in 530 or 540 that Aksum was fifteen days' journey from Adulis, and that both places were 'the chief centres of trade for gold dust, ivory, leather, hides and aromatics'; between them lay a town called Ave, almost certainly Yeha, where he claimed to have seen 'a great quantity of elephants, about 5,000 collected together'.¹¹¹

The ambitious Abraha meanwhile was trying to develop the Christian city of Sana into a counter-attraction to the pagan city of Mecca, five hundred miles to the north, which was already before the advent of Mohamed a place of pilgrimage visited by people from all parts of Arabia. Abraha's policy aroused considerable resentment throughout the country and especially in Mecca where the loss of the pilgrim trade would have been financially disastrous.¹¹² An indignant citizen of Mecca, who belonged to the Fugaym tribe, made his way to Sana and profaned the beautiful church which Abraha had built; soon afterwards one of the latter's provincial governors, Mohamed ben Khuzai who had agreed to urge his people to make their pilgrimage to Sana, was assassinated. Abraha thereupon decided to destroy the sanctuary at Mecca and assembled his followers to prepare for war. His army is said to have been accompanied by one elephant, though other accounts mention two, thirteen and even a thousand. The sight of this animal or animals made such an impression on the Arabs who had not previously known so large a creature that the year 570 or 571 in which this event took place, and which is popularly believed to have coincided with the

110. Procopius, I, xx, 9-13.

111. Hourani, p. 44 and n; Bent, pp. 143, 177; Gibbon XLII; Bury, p. 326; Dindorf, Vol. I, pp. 473-8.

112. Conti Rossini, p. 190.

birth of the prophet Mohamed, is given the name *am al-fil*, or the 'year of the elephant'.¹¹³

Brushing aside all opposition Abraha reached Tayif, three stages east of the sacred city and dispatched raiding parties which captured among other booty two hundred camels. Following with his main army, he halted outside Mecca and sent envoys to inform the citizens that he had no desire to hurt them but was determined to destroy the pagan sanctuary or *kabah*. After some parley Abraha decided to attack, but it is related that on the fateful day the elephant refused to advance as is commemorated in the following passage in the *Koran*: 'Hast thou not seen how thy Lord dealt with the army of the Elephant? Did he not cause their stratagem to miscarry? And he sent against them flocks of little birds which cast upon them clay stones, and made them like unto the stubble of which the cattle have eaten.' The reference is to an epidemic of smallpox, termed 'small stones' in Arabic, which broke out at this juncture and is held by some to have been the first of its kind in Arabia. Abraha's army at once retreated, its commander himself dying of the disease. The news of these events enhanced both the esteem in which the shrine at Mecca was held and the prestige of the Quraish, the guardians of the holy place.¹¹⁴

Abraha's action had far-reaching effects, for as a result the Himyarite chiefs invited Persian intervention in their affairs. Upon the death of Abraha his son Yaksum held the viceroyalty for a while and was succeeded by his brother Masruk. At some time between 574 and 578 this viceroy was decisively defeated by King Noshirwan of Persia, whereupon the Ethiopian Empire in Arabia collapsed and the old Himyarite monarchy was re-established under the hegemony of Zoroastrian Persia (570-628). Not content with destroying Aksumite influence in Arabia the Persians seem to have attempted to carry the war to the African shore. The overseas trade of Aksum, which was gravely affected by these events, was further hampered by the fact that the Blemmyes, a people in the Sudan who had been friendly to the

113. It has been suggested that the story of the elephant may in fact be apocryphal, and based upon the similarity between the name Aphilas, the Aksumite King who ruled the Yaman two and a half centuries earlier, and *al fil*, the Arabic for 'the elephant'. *Vide* Conti Rossini, pp. 194-5.

114. Hitti, p. 64; Sykes, Vol. I, p. 455.

city guarding its overland route with Egypt, were defeated by another tribe under the leadership of Silko of Nubia and disappear from history after about 543. In this way two principal lines of communication linking Aksum with the outside world – the land route to Egypt and the sea route to Arabia – passed almost simultaneously into hostile hands.¹¹⁵

The Rise of Islam

The troubles in South Arabia appear to have caused a shift in the main direction of Aksumite overseas contact from the Yaman to the Hijaz¹¹⁶ and the rich trading cities of Mecca and Tayif whence caravans travelled to the Red Sea coast and the Yaman every autumn and to Syria every spring.¹¹⁷ The Aksumites were therefore in close communication with the land which was to produce the prophet Mohamed. Relations between them and the new faith were at first cordial, though, as we shall see, the birth of Islam necessarily transformed the entire Middle Eastern balance of power and had profound economic consequences.

Mohamed appears to have been well acquainted with Ethiopia for, as a posthumous child he had been brought up by his grandfather, Abdal Muttalib, who had visited it on business.¹¹⁸ Ethiopia, as Sir William Muir emphasizes in his *Life of Mahomet*, was moreover 'well known at Mecca as a market for goods of Arabia' and Aksum was the 'ordinary destination' of many of its traders. Muslim tradition states that when his Arabian followers were persecuted in Mecca by the Quraish, the prophet pointing to the west, said to them: 'Yonder lieth a country wherein no one is wronged: a land of righteousness. Depart thither; and remain until it pleaseth the Lord to open your way before you.' In the seventh month of the fifth year of Mohamed's mission, A.D. 615, eleven men, some mounted, some on foot, and four of them accompanied by their wives, therefore set out for the port of Shueiba (the ancient port of Mecca, not far from Jeddah); where, finding two vessels about to sail, they embarked in haste, and were conveyed across the Red Sea for half a *dinar* (about seven shillings)¹¹⁹ apiece. The Quraish pur-

115. Conti Rossini, p. 201.

117. Muir, p. 212.

116. *ibid.*, p. 203.

118. Watt, p. 30.

119. For a discussion on the value of the *dinar* at this time, *vide* Muir, p. 212 n.

sued them, but they had already left the port. Among the emigrants were Othman, son of Affan, followed by his wife Rockeya the prophet's daughter, and Abd al Rahman, both of whom are believed to have previously traded with the country. The party was headed by Othman son of Matzun. They met with a kind reception from the Aksumite sovereign and his people.¹²⁰

This is termed the first *hijra*, or flight, to Ethiopia, as distinguished from the later and more extensive emigration.¹²¹ On this occasion the emigrants were few, but, Sir William Muir affirms, 'the part they acted was of deep importance in the history of Islam. It convinced the Quraish of the sincerity and resolution of the converts, and proved their readiness to undergo any loss and any hardship rather than abjure the faith of Mahomet. A bright example of self-denial was exhibited to the whole body of believers who were led to regard peril and exile in "the cause of God", as a privilege and a distinction. It must also have suggested the possibility that the hostile attitude of their fellow citizens, combined with the merits of their creed, might secure from them within the limits of Arabia itself a sympathy and hospitality as cordial as that afforded by the Abyssinian King; and thus it gave birth to the idea of a great "Hegira" – the emigration to Medina. Finally, it turned the attention of Mahomet more closely and favourably to the Christian religion. If an Arab asylum had not at last offered itself at Medina, the prophet himself might have emigrated to Abyssinia, and Mahometanism might have dwindled, like Montanism, into an ephemeral Christian heresy.'¹²²

Less than three months after their departure from Arabia the refugees are said to have reappeared at Mecca in the mistaken belief that Mohamed had converted the Quraish. They were, however, immediately disillusioned. 'The report brought by the emigrants of their kind reception by the Najashy' (ruler of Ethiopia), writes Sir William Muir, 'annoyed the Quraish, and

120. Muir, p. 74.

121. For a discussion on the number of expeditions to Ethiopia and the cause of the emigration, *vide* Watt, pp. 109–17, 182–6, *et passim*. The author suggests various possible explanations for the emigration and its relatively long duration, namely (1) that Mohamed was afraid of the apostasy of his followers; (2) that he was afraid of a schism among them; (3) that they themselves were anxious to trade in Ethiopia; (4) that Mohamed hoped they could prevail on the Ethiopians to give him military aid.

122. Muir, p. 75.

the persecution became hotter than ever. Wherefore Mahomet again recommended his followers to take refuge in Abyssinia. The first party of the new expedition set out about the sixth year of the mission; and thereafter at intervals small bodies of converts, accompanied sometimes by their wives and children, joined the exiles, until they reached (without calculating their little ones) the number of one hundred and one. Of these, eighty-three were men. Amongst the women, eleven were of the Quraish, and seven belonged to other tribes. Thirty-three of the men, with eight women (including Othman and his wife Rockeya the daughter of Mahomet), again returned to Mecca, and eventually emigrated to Madina. The rest of the refugees remained in Abyssinia for several years.¹²³

The Quraish, disquieted by the hospitable reception afforded to the refugees at the Aksumite court sent an embassy to King Armah (seventh century) in the hope of securing their return. Two important courtiers laden with costly presents declared that 'certain fools amongst their own people had left their ancestral faith; that they had not joined Christianity, but had set up a new religion of their own. They had therefore been deputed by the Quraish to fetch them back'.¹²⁴ The King, unwilling to consider the matter solely on the representations of these emissaries examined the leader of the refugees, Jafar bin Abi Talib who was in fact Mohamed's cousin. According to Ibn Hisham, the prophet's earliest biographer who wrote in A.D. 828, Jafar told the King that the Arabs were 'a barbarous nation, worshipping idols, eating carrion, committing shameful deeds, killing our blood relations, forgetting our duty towards our neighbours, the strong among us devouring the weak. Such was our state until God sent us an apostle (Mohamed), from amongst ourselves, with whose lineage, integrity, trustworthiness and purity we were acquainted. He summoned us to God, to believe in His unity, to worship Him and abandon the stones and idols which we and our fathers had worshipped in His stead. . . . Wherefore our countrymen turned against us and persecuted us to try and seduce us from our faith that we might abandon the worship of God and return to the worship of idols'.¹²⁵ Jafar went on to quote

123. *ibid.*, pp. 86, 92.

124. *ibid.*, p. 97 n.

125. Trimmingham, p. 45.

selected passages from the *Koran* (IV 169, XIX 16–34) to show the close relationship between Christianity and Islam. When he had finished speaking Armah declared that he found nothing to object to in Jafar's words. 'Verily', he added, 'this revelation and that of Moses are from the same source.' He therefore returned the gifts of the Quraish, saying, so tradition holds: 'If you were to offer me a mountain of gold I would not give up these people who have taken refuge with me.'¹²⁶

The friendly attitude of the Aksumite monarch justified Mohamed's reputed declaration that Ethiopia was a kingdom wherein none was persecuted; it had the incidental result, however, of causing a number of the early Muslims to embrace Christianity. Ibn Hisham relates, for example, that Ubed Allah bin Tahsh (whose wife Umm Habibah the prophet subsequently married) was converted in Ethiopia, and on meeting his former co-religionists would say to them: 'We now see clearly, but you are still blinking.'¹²⁷

In 627 the prophet felt strong enough to address written dispatches to a number of neighbouring kings calling upon them to acknowledge him as the true apostle of God. King Armah's court, as Sir William Muir explains, stood 'in a different relation to Mahomet from that of the other courts to which he addressed his apostolic summons'.¹²⁸ Not only had his followers found a secure and hospitable retreat there at the worst period of persecution, but fifty or sixty still enjoyed the sovereign's protection. In his letter to this ruler the prophet declared, 'Glory be to God, the Only One, the Holy One, the peaceful and faithful Protector. I testify that Jesus, the Son of Mary, is the Spirit and Word of God, and that He sent them down into Mary, the blessed and immaculate Virgin, and she conceived. He created Jesus of His Own Spirit and made him to live by His breath, even as he did Adam. I now summon thee to worship the One God who is without counterpart, and who rules the heavens and the earth. Accept my mission, follow me, and become one of my disciples, for I am the Apostle of God.'

On the subject of the Muslim refugees, he added: 'I have sent Jafar and other believers into thy country; protect them and

126. Budge, Vol. I, pp. 270–1.

127. Trimmingham, p. 46.

128. Muir, p. 386.

supply their needs. Set aside thy pride of sovereignty. I call upon thee and thy hosts to accept the worship of the Supreme Being. My mission is over. I have preached, and may heaven grant that my councils may be of benefit to those who hear. Peace shall be with the man who shall walk in the life of the True Belief.'

Budge relying on Arab writings, which in this case appear dubious, relates that when Armah received this letter he laid it on his head and eyes as a mark of deep respect, and then left his throne and seated himself on the ground and said the 'Shahada' or 'Testimony' that there was no god but Allah and that Mohamed was his prophet.¹²⁹ Later he collected a series of gifts for Mohamed and sent them to him together with a dispatch in which he said: 'In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. To Mohamed, the Apostle of God, King Armah (sends) greeting. Peace be unto thee, O Apostle of God. May He shelter thee under His compassion, and give thee blessings in abundance. There is no god but Allah, who has brought me to Islam. Thy letter I have read, O Prophet, what thou hast said about Jesus is the right belief, for he hath said nothing more than that. I testify my belief in the King of Heaven and earth. Thy advice I have pondered over deeply. Jafar and his company have been received with the honour due to them in my country and have been treated hospitably. I testify that thou art the Apostle of God, and I have sworn this in the presence of Jafar, and have acknowledged Islam before him. I attach myself to the worship of the Lord of Worlds, O Prophet. I send my son Area as my envoy to thee, but if thou dost command it I will go myself and do homage to the holiness of thy mission. I testify that thy words are true.'

In a second dispatch carried to Ethiopia by his cousin Khaded, son of Zaid, the prophet asked Armah to send back forty of his followers who were still living in Ethiopia and to betroth to him Umm Habibah, the daughter of Abu Sufyan, whose maiden name was Ramia; her former husband Ubed Allah had died in Ethiopia after embracing Christianity, as we have seen. Armah performed the betrothal ceremony and gave Umm Habibah 400

129. *Vide* Budge's suggestion that Armah 'was in no position to fight against Islam' and therefore 'saved his country from Arab invasion by his submission'. Budge, Vol. I, p. 273.

dinars (according to Budge about £200), as her dowry. He then delivered her to Jafar whom he sent back to Arabia loaded with precious gifts for the prophet.¹³⁰ To facilitate their journey he is also said to have provided the exiles with two ships.¹³¹

Umm Habibah returned home with the other exiles in 629 and was duly married to the prophet, his ninth wife. From her and Umm Salma, who had also been in Ethiopia, he learnt of the beauty of the Ethiopian cathedral of St. Mary at Aksum and of the wonderful pictures on its walls.¹³² Mohamed's second wife, Sowdah widow of Sokran, had also been in exile in Ethiopia on two occasions with her first husband. The close ties between Ethiopia and Mohamed's early followers can thus be exemplified by the life histories of two of his eleven wives.¹³³

The Muslim refugees retained a spirit of goodwill towards the land that had afforded them asylum. On learning of their treatment in exile the prophet is said to have expressed tender sentiments for the Ethiopian people; he prayed for King Armah's soul when he died and commanded his own followers to 'leave the Abyssinians in peace', thereby exempting them from the horrors of the *jihad*, or 'Holy War'.¹³⁴ It is therefore not surprising that Arab writers of later centuries devoted much attention to the friendly power across the Red Sea.

Ethiopia and Arabia, it should be emphasized were at this time closely related both by trade and migration. It is interesting to note that at the birth of Islam the *kabah*, the unpretentious cube-like structure housing the famous black meteorite which had become a fetish, is said to have been rebuilt by al-Walid ibn-al-Mughirah from the wreckage of some Greek or Byzantine ships destroyed on the shore of the Red Sea on their way to Adulis.¹³⁵ Professor Hitti argues moreover that 'the Koranic references to the sea and its tempest (XVI 14, X 23-4, XXIV 40), which are characterized by unusual clarity and vividness, are an echo of the active maritime intercourse between al-Hijaz and Abyssinia'.¹³⁶ Mecca had long been the abode of a considerable number of Ethiopians some of whom had probably come for purposes of trade while others had been imported as slaves; many of the latter were employed as soldiers by the rich

130. Budge, Vol. I, pp. 271-3.

131. Muir, p. 387.

132. *ibid.*, p. 503.

133. Lamairesse and Dujarric, pp. 360-73.

134. Hitti, p. 100.

135. *ibid.*, p. 106; Conti Rossini, p. 200.

136. Hitti, p. 106.

traders, and according to the Madina poet, Kais ibn al Khatim, who died a few years before the *hijra*, were known as *asakir* (singular *askar*). More frequently, however, they were termed *ahabish* (singular *ahbush*), a derivative of Habash or Abyssinia.^{137 138} It was probably from these soldier-slaves that the Arabs learned the use of the lance or javelin (Arabic *harbah*) which they adopted a little after this period.¹³⁹ The most notable of the Ethiopian community at Mecca in Mohamed's time was probably Bilal, the son of an Ethiopian slave girl, whose stentorial voice secured for him the unique distinction of becoming Mohamed's *muezzin*.¹⁴⁰ The prophet called him 'the first fruits of Abyssinia'.

Despite Mohamed's declaration that there should be no Holy War against the Ethiopians, the rise of Islam had disastrous repercussions on Aksum for the dynamic spirit of the new religion unified and vitalized the Arab peoples and enabled them to create a rival power group which soon began to invade neighbouring countries. In 636 Uthman the Thaqafite, governor of Bahrayn, set sail from Oman to raid the Indian coast at Tanah near Bombay, while his brother attacked the bay of al-Daybul at the mouth of the Indus. The succeeding governor of Bahrayn, al Ala, crossed into Persia and penetrated as far as Istakh (Persepolis). More serious for Aksum was the Arab occupation of Palestine in 636 and the conquest of Egypt in 640-2, with whose ancient church of Alexandria the Ethiopian Church had been affiliated three centuries earlier. For over half a millennium, as we have seen, the Aksumites, though geographically isolated, had maintained contact with friendly civilizations, first Hellenic and later of the Christian world. The advance of Islam brought an end to that state of affairs for the Aksumites were one of the few peoples in this area to remain faithful to Christianity. The advance of Islam thus cut the empire's principal routes of communication to the north and east; the new faith was destined in

137. The term Habash was derived from the name of a South Arabian tribe called Habashat which settled on the African coast perhaps in the seventh century B.C. Many Arabs of later times incorrectly assumed the name to be derived from the Arabic word *Habash* or 'mixed' suggesting that the Habashi were of mixed South Arabian and African descent or not of pure race.

138. Conti Rossini, pp. 205-6.

139. Hitti, p. 173.

140. Person who calls to prayer.

later centuries also to spread to the south and west, thus rendering Ethiopia's isolation almost complete, a Christian island in a Muslim sea.

It was not long moreover before a bitter conflict broke out between Aksumites and Arabs on either side of the Red Sea. The cause of the dispute is obscure though Conti Rossini, relying on the documents of the Arabs, which are inevitably one-sided, suggests that it was probably due to piracy on the Arabian coast. According to this argument, the Aksumite State was indifferent to these raids which appeared to be based on its shores and may indeed have received unofficial encouragement from its provincial governors and naval commanders.¹⁴¹ The Arab historian Ibn Ishaq relates that in July or August of the year 630, ships from the African shore approached the Arabian coast at Shueiba with hostile intentions, but withdrew before they could be intercepted. Some years later, in 640 according to one version or 651 according to another, a fleet of ships from African waters sailed down the Arabian shore; Khalifa Umar bin al Khattab dispatched a small naval expedition against it, but was so disastrously defeated that he swore he would have no more to do with the sea. The Aksumites, it appears, were themselves also suffering from the activities of pirates; it is said that Arabs raided Adulis in 640, destroying the port which for one reason or another never rose again.¹⁴²

The Arabs were by now becoming increasingly interested in mastering the sea. Khalifa Moawiyah (661-680) succeeded in building a navy which was not able, however, to prevent pirates from the African shore from sacking Jeddah in 702.¹⁴³ This attempt seems to have made a deep impression on the Arabs who, according to Conti Rossini, were afraid that the holy city of Mecca would be the next place to be attacked; they therefore exerted themselves to the utmost, and, taking the offensive, seized a number of harbours on the opposite coast, including Suakin, where they dispossessed the Begas, Massawa, which was as yet only an anchorage, and the Dahlak islands facing the Aksumite coast. This operation was doubtless motivated also in no small degree by the Arabs' long enduring desire for loot from Africa,

141. Conti Rossini, pp. 212-13.

142. *ibid.*, p. 213-14; Kammerer, *La Mer Rouge*, Vol. I, pp. 220, 222; Bent, p. 230.

143. Conti Rossini, p. 212.

especially in the form of strong, able-bodied men and beautiful women.

Arab control of the ports necessarily had serious consequences for the Aksumites. Their empire's hitherto flourishing foreign trade shrank to modest dimensions, while cultural intercourse with the non-Arab peoples of the Middle East became increasingly difficult. Aksumite expansion southwards is believed to have begun at this time.

The Decline of Aksum: Gudit and the Zagwe

The isolation caused by the conquests of Islam was not the only cause for the decline of Aksum and the southward orientation of the empire. Conti Rossini has argued at length that the Bega may have contributed to this development.¹⁴⁴ Owing to the poverty of their country, which lay to the north-west of Aksum, they are thought to have been subject, like other nomadic tribes, to waves of expansion which are said to have carried them into Hamasien and other rich provinces of the plateau at the end of the seventh century or early in the eighth century. The Aksumites are supposed to have been thus thrust in a southward direction while their trade routes, both overland through Nubia and by sea through Massawa, were rendered more insecure.¹⁴⁵

This phase of Aksumite history has often been termed a period of decadence, for though the empire continued to expand and though most of the traditions of the people were by now firmly established, the country had undoubtedly seen better days.¹⁴⁶ Commerce and intercourse with foreign lands in particular seem to have shrunk beyond all recognition. The currency issued after the seventh century appears to reflect the commercial stagnation of the realm. Gold coins and coins with Greek inscriptions become infrequent after the reign of King Iathlia in the seventh or eighth century – probably an indication that international trade

144. *ibid.*, pp. 267–80.

145. Contemporary Arab sources refer to the Ethiopian capital at this time as Kabar or Kabir which Conti Rossini considers to have been merely another name for Aksum, though some writers have placed it to the south of that city. *Vide* Kammerer, *La Mer Rouge*, Vol. I, pp. 222, 323–4; Trimingham, p. 51; Conti Rossini, p. 281.

146. Conti Rossini, pp. 265–80; Budge, Vol. I, p. 274; Kammerer, *La Mer Rouge*, Vol. I, pp. 220, 322–4; Trimingham, pp. 44, 47–8.

was no longer considered sufficiently important to warrant their production. The bronze coins seem at the same time to have deteriorated in quality.

As the hitherto easily accessible plains of the north-west and the overseas territories of Arabia were now closed to the Aksumites they are thought to have turned towards the difficult mountains of the interior, only the northernmost parts of which had earlier been occupied by Ezana. Though the child of necessity this development was of immense long-term significance as it spread Ethiopic civilization deep into the great plateau, that is to say into southern Tigre, Amhara and Shoa, as well as perhaps to provinces still farther south where the Guragé and Harari peoples¹⁴⁷ of the present day, who speak a language akin to Ethiopic, may still bear witness to the extent of Aksumite expansion.¹⁴⁸

The empire continued, however, to enjoy some access to the sea, particularly along the coast to the south of Massawa. Thus the Arab historian Al Yaqubi, writing in 872, declared that the Najashi ruled an extensive realm with a number of important cities and received tribute from many vassal rulers. He records that the kingdom, whose capital he calls Kabar(?), stretched to the coast and, as in former times, included the Dahlak islands. Another Arab writer, Al Masudi, writing in 935, confirmed that the Ethiopians were still in control of the coast, and observed that Dahlak and the coastal plains were tributary to Ethiopia. He added that a treaty of friendship had been signed between the Najashi and the Yamani King Ibrahim bin Ziyad, also known as Sahib al Harmalay (*d.* 901–2), as a result of which Yamani ships from Zabid enjoyed a thriving trade with Ethiopia. He stated that the capital was Kabar which he called ‘a great city and the seat of the Kingdom of the Najashi’. ‘The country’, he concluded, ‘possessed many towns and extensive territories stretching as far as the Abyssinian (Red) Sea. To it belongs the coastal plain opposite Yaman where there are many cities such as Zeila,

147. It has been suggested that the Gurages may have come from Gura, near Decamere in modern Eritrea. It may, however, be argued on the contrary that the Gurage and Harari peoples did not in fact originate from the Aksumite empire, but were a separate group of Semitic immigrants who entered Africa further south than the ancestors of the Aksumites, proceeding first to the Harar region and later to what is now the Gurage area.

148. Conti Rossini, p. 283.

Dahlak and Nasi (Badi,¹⁴⁹ according to Trimingham) in which there are Muslims tributary to the Abyssinians.' Ibn Hawqal, writing in 977-8, gave a similar picture, observing that Zeila was in the possession of Ethiopian Christians who enjoyed peaceful trading relations with the Muslims of the Yaman. He reminded his readers that the land of the Najashi was not subject to the *jihad* or Holy War.¹⁵⁰

To the south of the Horn of Africa the ports of Mogadishu and Brava are believed to have been brought under Arab influence at about this time if not earlier. According to old records from Pate in East Africa cited by Captain C. H. Stigand the Arab Abdul Malik bin Muriani built the cities of Pate, Malindi, Zanzibar, Mombasa, Lamu and Kilwa in the seventy-seventh year of the *hijra*, i.e. A.D. 696-7. Another local tradition, however, holds that the ports of Mogadishu and Brava were founded about 920 by the 'seven brothers of El Ahsa', Omani Arabs, probably of the El Harth tribe, who had fled from Arabia to escape persecution. To the same century belongs the tradition of 'Hasan-bin-Ali and his Six Sons' who are believed to have founded Arab settlements farther to the south. It is said that a son begotten by the Sultan of Shiraz of an Ethiopian slave woman was out-rivalled by his half brothers and accordingly crossed the seas with his six sons. They sailed to Africa in seven ships, and founded separate settlements, the most important of which were Mombasa, Pemba, and Yohanna in the Comoro Isles. Hassan himself founded Kilwa. Trimingham seems to agree with the latter account declaring that Mogadishu and Kilwa were founded by waves of Qarmatians from al-Ahsa, the first between 900 and 950 and the second in A.D. 984.¹⁵¹

A new and serious threat to the Aksumite Empire is believed to have developed towards the end of the tenth century when the Agao tribe rebelled. The Ethiopian manuscripts, which are by no means contemporary to this event, do not agree on the details or dates, and scholars are divided as to whether the first rebels were pagan or Jewish. It is generally agreed, however, that the rebellion was begun by an Agao princess, variously named

149. Badi, probably Massawa, still called Base in Tigrinya and Bade in Bedawie.

150. Quoted in Trimingham, pp. 49-51.

151. Stigand, p. 29; Coupland, p. 23; Trimingham, p. 62. *Vide* also Guilain, Vol. I, Part I, pp. 176-84, 287-91.

Gudit or Yodit (Judith), Astar, and, by the Arabs, Eve, who was also sometimes nicknamed Isat (or fire). Her husband is supposed to have been the governor of the district of Bugna in Lasta. She is said to have overthrown the Christian faith and with it the existing monarchy which claimed descent from the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon. According to Ethiopian tradition the King of Aksum, Anbasa Weddem (tenth century(?)), was a child at the time and his government was unable to defend itself against the uprising. He therefore fled southwards to Shoa with a few members of the court and settled in Manz, while Gudit entered the palace at Aksum, sacked the ancient capital and killed the royal princes, said to be four hundred in number, who were traditionally confined on the mountain of Debra Damo.^{152 153}

Partial confirmation of these accounts is to be found in the records of the Arab historian Ibn Hawqal, who, writing in 978, observed: 'As regards Abyssinia, for many years it has had a woman as its ruler. It is she who killed the King of Abyssinia who was known under the title of *hadani* (i.e. our *hade*, *hatse* or Emperor), and she continues to this day to dominate her own country and the neighbouring regions of the land of the *hadani* in the west of Abyssinia.'¹⁵⁴ In seeming contradiction to this chronicle the *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria* suggests that the Aksumite kingdom was at this time still resisting the invader; it states that shortly after 979, the King of Ethiopia wrote a letter to King George of Nubia, for transmission to the Coptic Patriarch Philotheos, which announced that a Queen of another people had invaded his country and was burning towns, destroying churches and obliging him to flee from one place to another.

Ethiopian tradition holds that Gudit reigned forty years and that after her death Anbasa Weddem returned to Aksum reigning for a further twenty years. He was succeeded by his son Del Naad whose ten-year rule was brought to an end by a dynastic revolution effected by Takla Haymanot, apparently one of his servants from Hamasien who had married the King's daughter against her father's will. This man (who must not be confused

152. A flat-topped mountain.

153. Budge, Vol. I, p. 213; *Guide Book to Ethiopia*, p. 14. For a discussion of various alternative theories of these events, *vide* Budge, Vol. I, pp. 213-18.

154. Cerulli, *L'Etiofia medievale*, pp. 272-6; Trimmingham, p. 52.

with the saint of the same name) usurped the throne after killing his father-in-law, and founded a new line of kings known as the Zagwe dynasty. There is little agreement, however, about the date of this event which has been variously put as 928, 1137, 1145 and 1147.¹⁵⁵ It is often said that the dynasty was maintained by eleven kings, of whom the first five were Jewish or pagan and the last six Christian.¹⁵⁶

Whatever the precise details of the Zagwe era there is no gain-saying that it was a turbulent period which must have been detrimental to trade. The usurpation and the consequent shift of power from Aksum to Lasta seems to have brought an end to the Aksumite currency; the last coins are believed to have been struck by King Gersem or King Hataz. There was also considerable political fragmentation, for while the usurpers reigned in Lasta, Del Naad and his successors ruled independently in Shoa, and separatist dynasties seized control of Dahlak and Zeila.

The Arabs furthermore were extending their influence on the African continent. Until this time most of the inhabitants of what is now the Eritrean coast, and indeed as far north as Suakin, were Christian, but large-scale conversions to Islam were now taking place in these and other regions, the process being facilitated, as Trimingham declares, by 'the coming of an Arab or Arabs from Arabia who married into a leading family and whose descendants formed an aristocracy'. Strong ties with the Muslim world grew up at this time all along the coast, many of whose inhabitants visited Mecca on pilgrimage. Some even attended the Muslim schools of Madina, Cairo, and elsewhere; the mosque of the Umayyads at Damascus, for example, had a section especially reserved for students from Zeila. Islam was also spreading inland in the Sidama kingdoms of the south, as well as in the eastern Shoan highlands, where a sultanate had been in existence for a long time. Other Muslim principalities included those of Adal, Mora, Hobat, Jidaya and Jubbah (Argobbah), while those of Hadya, Fatajar, Ifat, Dawaro, Bali and Mara, stretched from the coast inland to Afar, and the present-day provinces of Harar and Arussi. They extended as far as the lakes, thereby ringing the east and south of the Ethiopian massif. Isolated Muslim

155. Conti Rossini, pp. 303-22. Budge, Vol. I, p. 218; *Guide Book to Ethiopia*, p. 14; Trimingham, p. 55.

156. Budge, Vol. I, p. 214.

communities were also to be found in the Christian areas.¹⁵⁷

Notwithstanding the decline of the empire the Zagwe period was characterized by important religious and cultural activity and is of course famous for the wonderful rock-hewn churches in the neighbourhood of Roha or Lalibela in Lasta which were cut at this time.¹⁵⁸ The Ethiopian chronicle of the reign of Lalibela, the most important of the Zagwe kings, relates that this monarch, who was a devout Christian, devoted himself with great zeal to the building of ten monolithic churches. A fifteenth-century Ethiopic manuscript by Abba Amha of the church of Golgotha at Lalibela relates that the King 'collected artificers, carpenters, masons and others, had tools forged, arranged a scale of wages for the workers, and purchased from the people the ground which he required. Angels joined the workmen and toiled with them by day, and in the night they did double the amount of work which the men had done during the day'.¹⁵⁹

Contact with other lands was maintained throughout this period and large numbers of Ethiopian pilgrims journeyed to Jerusalem. It is also related that Copts from Egypt fled to Ethiopia to escape from the persecution of Al Hakim (996-1021) and doubtless contributed to the economic as well as to the literary and religious life of the country.¹⁶⁰ Bruce and others have suggested that these or later refugees probably included 'masons, builders and hewers of stone' who may have assisted in building the Lalibela churches,¹⁶¹ while Ludolphus states that King Lalibela actually sent for artisans from Egypt.¹⁶²

The Solomonic Restoration

The Zagwe era is said to have come to an end when the grandson(?) of Lalibela, Naakuto Laab, a just and peaceable prince, agreed to a request by the famous cleric, Abuna (metropolitan) Takla Haymanot, the founder of the monastery of Debra

157. Budge, Vol. I, p. 284; Trimmingham, pp. 60, 62-3.

158. A considerable literature has been devoted to these churches, the most recent works on the subject being: A. A. Monti della Corte, *Lalibela, le chiese ipogee e monolitiche e gli altri monumenti medievali de Lasta*, 1940; L. Findlay, *Monolithic Churches of Lalibela*, 1943; D. R. Buxton, *The Christian Antiquities of Northern Ethiopia*, 1947, and I. Bidder, *Lalibela, the Monolithic Churches of Ethiopia*, 1959.

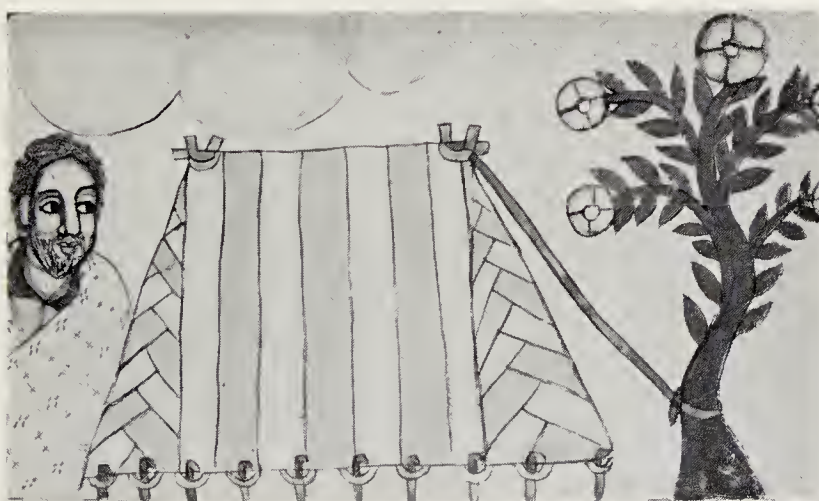
159. Budge, Vol. I, p. 282. 161. Bruce, Vol. I, p. 529; Coulbeaux, p. 237.

160. Trimmingham, p. 56. 162. Ludolphus, p. 170.



Above: Travelling. Note method of riding, especially the way of using the stirrup. Women generally speaking travelled separately, accompanied by attendants, and were often closely muffled. (From an eighteenth century MS., British Museum Orient 728.)

Below: A traditional tent. (From an eighteenth century MS., British Museum Orient 590.)





Above: Building. The artist depicts the construction of the Tower of Babel with the Gondar castles in mind. (From an eighteenth century MS., British Museum Orient 590.)

Below: Wood-cutting. Note the traditional Ethiopian axe. (From an eighteenth century MS., British Museum Orient 590.)



Libanos, that he should abdicate in favour of Yekuno Amlak (1268–1283 or 1270–1285) a prince of the Solomonic line which had found refuge in Shoa.

The peace treaty is believed to have contained four articles, all of considerable importance, which not only provided for the change of dynasty but defined the relationship of State and Church and governed the position of church land at least in outline for over half a millennium to come. The terms are given by the eighteenth-century Scottish traveller, James Bruce, who based himself on Ethiopian tradition:

‘The first was that Naacueto Laab, prince of the house of Zagué (Zagwe) should forthwith resign the kingdom of Abyssinia to Icon Amlac (Yekuno Amlak) reigning prince of the line of Solomon then in Shoa.

‘The second, that a portion of lands in Lasta should be given to Naacueto Laab and his heirs in absolute property, irrevocably and irredeemably; that he should preserve, as marks of sovereignty, two silver kettle-drums, or *nagareets*; that the points of the spears of his guard, the globes that surmounted his *sendeck* (that is the pole upon which the colours are carried) should be silver, and that he should sit upon a gold stool, or chair, in form of that used by the kings of Abyssinia; and that both he and his descendants should be absolutely free from all homage, services, taxes, or public burdens for ever, and be styled kings of Zagué, or the Lasta kings.¹⁶³

‘The third article was that one-third of the kingdom should be appropriated and ceded absolutely to the Abuna himself, for the maintenance of his own state, and for the support of the clergy, convents and churches in the kingdom; and this became afterwards an era, or epoch, in Abyssinian history, called the era of partition.

‘The fourth, and last article provided that no native Abyssinian could thereafter be chosen Abuna, and this even tho’ he was ordained at, and sent from Cairo.’¹⁶⁴

‘It is one of the remarkable facts in the annals of this country’, concludes Bruce, ‘that the article between Icon Amlac and the house of Zagué was observed for near five hundred years; for it

163. The descendants of the Zagwe are said to have continued to hold authority but in Wag rather than in Lasta, and to have borne the hereditary title of Wagshum.

164. Bruce, Vol. I, pp. 533–4.

was made before the year 1300, and never was broken, but by the treacherous murder of the Zaguéan prince by Allo Fasil in the unfortunate war of Begemder, in the reign of Joas¹⁶⁵ in 1768, the year before I arrived in Abyssinia; neither has any Abuna native of Abyssinia ever been known since that period. As for the exorbitant grant of one-third of the kingdom to the Abuna, it has been in great measure resumed, as we may naturally suppose, upon different pretences of misbehaviour, true or alleged, by the king or his ministers, the first great invasion of it being in the subsequent reign of King Theodorus (Theodore I, 1411-1414), who, far from losing popularity by this infraction, has been ever reckoned a model for sovereigns.¹⁶⁶

Yekuno Amlak, whose reign marks a turning point in Ethiopian history, made his capital not at Aksum but at his native town of Tegulet in Shoa, thus shifting the centre of the State from Tigre and Lasta to Shoa in the south. Since he and his forebears had been living there for several generations he spoke Amharic, the language of Amhara and Shoa, which he is said to have made the official language of the realm.¹⁶⁷ Bruce's assertion that he greatly increased the extent of church lands is confirmed by an early Ethiopic manuscript which states that 'he gave to Takla Haymanot the third part of his kingdom'.¹⁶⁸ His reign was also characterized by bitter conflict with the sultanate of Ifat which was menacing the fertile regions of Shoa. The King, says Budge, 'hated the Arabs, and marshalled all his forces and attacked them furiously whenever possible'; nevertheless he 'suffered great losses in these wars, and the Muslims laid waste parts of his country'.¹⁶⁹

The restoration of the Solomonic line was also accompanied by a significant literary revival, perhaps attributable to the increased wealth of the Church, the predominant patron of the arts. 'During the fourteenth century', writes Budge, 'the chroniclers and scribes compiled histories of their country to which they prefixed lists of kings from Adam downwards'.¹⁷⁰ The most important of these works was the *Kebra Nagast*, or 'Glory of

165. Iyoas (Adyam Sagad III, 1755-1769).

166. *ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 534-5. *Vide also Correspondence respecting Abyssinia*, p. 605.

167. Pankhurst, p. 292.

168. Bruce, Vol. II, p. 2. *Vide also* Basset, *Etudes* pp. 9-10, 99; Conti Rossini, *Di un nuovo codice della cronica etiopica*, p. 5.

169. Budge, Vol. I, p. 285.

170. *ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 204.

Kings', written in Geez during the reign of Yekuno Amlak by Ishaq 'the poor man' who states that he based it on an earlier text in the library of the Patriarchs of Alexandria.¹⁷¹

The histories of the reigns which followed are concerned in large measure with innumerable wars against Muslim invaders. Much fighting occurred, in particular during the reign of Amda Tseyon I (Gabra Masqal I, 1312-1342 or 1314-1344) whom the Egyptian Ibn Fadl Allah (*d.* 1349) called 'a most valiant king' and an excellent administrator, just to his subjects and interested in the poor.¹⁷² The chronicle of his reign is nevertheless largely devoted to his campaigns against Muslim kingdoms which had grown up on the south-east borders of his realm, such as Ifat, Hadya, Fatajar, Dawaro, Bali, and above all Adal on the Gulf of Aden. All these kingdoms enjoyed much help, in arms and men from Arabia.¹⁷³ Bruce says that Ifat, Fatijar and Dawaro had all formerly been Christian provinces but had been ceded to Muslim governors in return for money and had by degrees renounced both their religion and allegiance to the Emperors.¹⁷⁴

The difficulties confronting the largely land-locked empire at this time are well exemplified in the travels of Marco Polo who tells what he calls the 'fine story' of a pilgrimage which an Emperor of Abash (Abyssinia) is said to have wished to attempt in 1288.¹⁷⁵ Though some of the details of the story are obviously unreliable the account as a whole reveals the profoundly religious character of contemporary Ethiopian society and the hardships which resulted from its isolation. 'You must know,' Marco Polo declares, 'that one day the King who was the supreme Lord of the province of Abash – and who was a Christian – said he would go on a pilgrimage to adore the Sepulchre of Christ at Jerusalem. His barons remarked that it would be too dangerous for him to go thither, and advised him to send a Bishop or other great prelate in his stead. And the King accepted the barons' advice. So he sent for a Bishop who was a man of very holy life, and told him he wished him to go in his stead. . . . And the Bishop said that he would perform his bidding as befitted a liegeman. The King then told him to get ready, and to set out as quickly as he might.'

171. Pankhurst, pp. 98-9.

172. Gaudefroy-Demombynes, p. 25.

173. Bruce, Vol. II, pp. 42-4, 49, 56.

174. *ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 13.

175. Marco Polo, pp. 348-9.

'The Bishop went; having taken leave of the King, and made himself ready to set out on his way, after the manner of a pilgrim, and most honourably attended. And he journeyed on, both by land and sea, until he arrived at Jerusalem. He went straight to the Sepulchre, and adored it, and paid it such honour and reverence as it due from a Christian to so exalted and noble a thing as this Sepulchre is. He also made many splendid offerings on behalf of the King who sent him. When the Bishop had duly and wisely performed all that he had been charged with, like the wise man he was, he set out again with all his following and he journeyed on, until he came to Aden (Adal). Now, you must know that in this kingdom of Aden Christians are greatly hated. For the people will not look at them, but detest them as their mortal enemies. When the Sultan of Aden heard this Bishop was a Christian and that he was an envoy of the great King of Abash, he had him straightway taken, and asked him if he was a Christian. And the Bishop answered that truly he was a Christian. Then the Sultan said to him, that unless he turned to the Law of Mahomet, he would do him shame and dishonour. And the other answered that he would sooner let himself be killed than do so. When the Sultan heard the Bishop's answer, he was greatly incensed, and made him be taken and circumcised. So the Bishop was taken hold of by many men, and circumcised after the Saracen fashion. After this had been done, the Sultan told him that he had him thus ignominiously treated in order to spite and put to shame the King his Lord. Having said this, he let him go.'

Marco Polo goes on to relate that when the Bishop had recovered, and could ride a horse, he set out on his way with all his company, and journeyed so long until he came to the King 'his Lord in Abash'. When the latter learnt of the outrage 'he was so grieved that he almost died of sorrow. He exclaimed aloud, so that all those around heard him clearly, that he would no longer wear a crown or rule a land, if he did not exact vengeance that the whole world should speak of it.

'What more shall I say?' Marco Polo concludes. 'You must know in very truth that the King mustered an immense force' and that 'when he was quite ready, with all his men, he set out, and marched on until he reached the Kingdom of Aden. When the King of Aden heard of his approach, he summoned to his aid two great Saracen Kings who were his neighbours, and with

a vast multitude of horsemen and foot-soldiers, went to wait for him at the fortified frontier passes, to defend his land, and prevent the enemy from invading it. Now, the King of Abash reached those passes with his host, and found the enemy there in great numbers. Then the cruellest and most terrible battle began. But it so came about that the three Saracen Kings could not hold out against the force of the King of Abash, for he had many and excellent troops. For Christians are much better soldiers than Saracens. So the Saracens retreated, and the Christian King and his men entered into the Kingdom of Aden. But you must know that at those passes very many Saracens were killed. What more shall I tell you? Know in truth that when the King of Abash and his men had entered the Kingdom of Aden, in three or four places, the Saracens barred the way at certain fortified places; but in vain did they try to defend them, for they were killed and slaughtered in great numbers. Now, when the Christian King had remained about a month in the land of the enemy, and had harried and devastated it, and put to death a great multitude of Saracens, he said that now the ignominy suffered by his Bishop had been well avenged, and that they could return honourably to their country. I will add, too, that he could not do much more damage to the enemy, for the passes he would still have to force were too strong, and dangerous, so that a handful of men might have inflicted great loss upon him. So they left the Kingdom of Aden and set out on their way, and they journeyed on, never resting until they reached Abash, their country.

‘Now you have heard how well and completely the Bishop was avenged upon those Saracen dogs. For truly the number of the killed was so great that it could not be counted, and many regions were also harried and devastated. Nor need this be wondered at for it is not right that the Saracen dogs should have the better of Christians.’

The first part of this account finds some confirmation from Arab sources which tell that the Ethiopian Emperor Yâgbea Tseyon (1285–1294) sent an embassy to Jerusalem which passed through Cairo in 1290.¹⁷⁶

176. Trimingham, p. 69 n.

The Realm of Prester John in the Middle Ages

During the twelfth century there were rumours in European Christendom of a mysterious Christian monarch called Prester John¹⁷⁷ who was believed to rule somewhere in the East. It was said to be in 'India', a term which in the parlance of the time meant anywhere from Egypt eastward and often included present-day Ethiopia. The kingdom of Prester John was considered a useful potential ally in the struggle against the Muslim powers. At first his kingdom was presumed to be somewhere in Asia, but later it was generally identified as Abyssinia, or High Ethiopia, a bastion of Christendom on the Horn of Africa.

Throughout this period the rulers of Ethiopia were striving to maintain their relations with the rest of the Christian world. They naturally attached great importance to the preservation of their ancient contact with Jerusalem which had begun within a few decades of the conversion of the Aksumite Empire in the fourth century and had continued uninterruptedly until 1187 when Sultan Saladin (1137-1193), having expelled the Latin kings from Jerusalem, officially recognized the Ethiopians by granting them the Chapel of the Invention of the Cross in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and a station in the Grotto of the Nativity in Bethlehem. Ten years earlier one of the Zagwe sovereigns is said to have expressed the desire for an altar in the church as well as for a church in Rome. In the following century the Emperor Yâgbea Tseyon (1285-1294) sent supplies to assist the Ethiopian monks in Jerusalem. The presence of Ethiopian ecclesiastics and pilgrims at the Holy Places was a valuable source of knowledge to Europeans desirous of obtaining information about their distant motherland.¹⁷⁸

The earliest known description of medieval Ethiopia derived from statements by the natives of the country was written by a Genoese cartographer, Giovanni da Carignano. In 1306 he questioned members of an Ethiopian embassy which had been obliged to wait at Genoa for a favourable wind on their way home from Avignon and Rome, and embodied his findings in a treatise on the government, customs and religious observances of the ancient

177. For a discussion of the supposed origin of the term, *vide* Budge, Vol. I, pp. 178-9, 275.

178. *Vide* Cerulli, *Etiopia in Palestina*, pp. 1, 31, *et passim*; Budge, Vol. I, p. 287.

African realm. His book had the distinction of being the first document to locate the kingdom of Prester John in the African continent. Unfortunately it is no longer extant, but it appears to have had a considerable influence on the map-makers of the day, Prester John being first identified with the Emperor of Ethiopia in a chart drawn by a Genoese cartographer in Mallorca in 1339.¹⁷⁹

Carignano's work was still available a century and a half later in 1483 when Jacopo Foresti of Bergamo (1434-1520) summarized it in his *Supplementum Chronicarum* which was published in Venice in that year. It reveals that the Ethiopian mission of 1306 had been directed to 'the King of the Spains'; it had apparently been sent by the Emperor Wedem Arad (1299-1314) who hoped for a European alliance against his Muslim enemies. No treaty was concluded, but as R. A. Skelton of the Hakluyt Society argues, the mission may have 'encouraged Genoese investment in trading ventures to Ethiopia'.¹⁸⁰

Muslim traders and pilgrims to Mecca, who were especially interested in Ethiopia on account of its early associations with Islam, also collected information. The Moroccan traveller, Ibn Battuta (1304-1377), who visited Mecca in 1330 and sailed widely in the neighbouring seas, included in his *Travels* interesting descriptions of the ports of Zeila and Mogadishu. A decade or so later the Egyptian courtier Ibn Fadl Allah (*d.* 1349) devoted much attention to Ethiopia in his important geographical work *Masalik al Absar* which was largely based on the accounts of Ethiopian and other travellers to Egypt and appears to have served as a basis for the *Kitab al ilmam* of the Arab historian Taki ed Din Ahmad Maqrizi.

Relations between Ethiopia and Egypt were often close. In 1387, for example, the Emperor Dawit I (1382-1411) sent an embassy to the court of Barquq, which was accompanied, it is said, by twenty camel-loads of gifts, presumably as a bribe to facilitate the dispatch of an Abuna. During the reign of Dawit's son Yeshaq (Isaac I, 1414-1429), Turkish mamelukes settled in Ethiopia. Yeshaq also considerably strengthened the position of the empire by occupying Zeila in 1415, and by bringing an end to the independent kingdom of Ifat.¹⁸¹

179. *Ethiopian Itineraries*, pp. 212-3.

180. *ibid.*, p. 212.

181. Trimingham, p. 74.

During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries contact between Ethiopians and the Christians of Europe steadily increased. In 1321 a certain Brother Jordanus was told by Italian merchants in India that 'the way into Ethiopia was open' and toward the end of the century a Florentine, Antonio Bartoli, actually reached the country. Not long afterwards in 1407 a young Italian, Pietro Rombulo, visited Ethiopia and was subsequently sent by the Emperor on a mission to India and China. Many years later in 1450 he told his adventures to Pietro Ranzano, a Dominican monk in Naples who recorded much of what he heard in an unpublished Latin work entitled *Annales*, which is preserved in the Biblioteca Comunale at Palermo, Sicily. Rombulo was closely followed by an embassy, sent by the French Duc de Berry, consisting of a Neapolitan called Pietro, a Frenchman and a Spaniard. Bernard de la Brocquière, who met Pietro in 1432, records that he had married an Ethiopian in the land of Prester John.¹⁸²

Faced by the increasing pressure of Islam and determined to maintain the faith of their fathers, the Christian sovereigns of Ethiopia continued their efforts to maintain relations with the rest of Christendom. The Emperor Zara Yaqob (Constantine I, 1434-1468), insisted that Saturday, the ancient Biblical sabbath, should be observed as well as Sunday and authorized Nicodemus, the superior of the Ethiopian community at Jerusalem, to enter into negotiations with the Roman See. Two Ethiopian delegates from Jerusalem therefore attended the ecclesiastical Council of Florence. Though this conference ostensibly reached an agreement it was repudiated when the delegates returned to their mother churches. There is no mention of these events in the Ethiopian chronicles, though it is known that at about this time there was much theological disputation, apparently with a Venetian artist, Nicolo Brancalone, who settled in Ethiopia.¹⁸³ Ethiopian ecclesiastics continued, however, to visit Jerusalem, where a large Ethiopian community resided, and Rome, where they were granted an establishment during Zara Yaqob's reign.¹⁸⁴

The map of the Venetian cartographer Fra Mauro which was completed on 26 August 1460, confirms that considerable

182. *Ethiopian Itineraries*, pp. 5-9.

183. Budge, Vol. I, p. 304.

184. Bruce, Vol. II, p. 69.

geographical knowledge about Ethiopia was by his time available in Venice. 'The Ethiopian portion', writes the late O. G. S. Crawford, 'is particularly good . . . and was based upon maps drawn by religious persons born in Ethiopia.'¹⁸⁵

Christian pilgrims to Jerusalem also brought back to Europe information about Ethiopia which they had acquired in the East. The German pilgrim Arnold von Harff, who left Cologne for the East in 1496 and returned at the end of the century, claimed, with what veracity is uncertain, that he had visited the country in the course of his travels.

European Christendom and the Ottoman Turks

During the fifteenth century Western European interest in Ethiopia increased for economic reasons. At the beginning of the century the south Asian trade route between Europe and the East was disrupted by the oriental conqueror Tamerlane (1336-1405) with the result that Europeans trading with the Orient turned their attention to the alternative route through Egypt and the Red Sea. The Egyptians, however, sought to benefit from this turn of events by demanding extortionate transit dues. 'A cargo of pepper that cost fifty *dinars* in Cairo was resold at Alexandria to Europeans for a hundred and thirty *dinars*. The Venetians remonstrated through their Consul, and getting no redress, broke off relations, and ordered a fleet to Alexandria to bring off all their merchants. . . . The Kings of Castile and Aragon also remonstrated.'¹⁸⁶ The capture of Constantinople by the Turks in 1453 closed the Bosphorus, thus cutting off the Black Sea and the northern ports of the old Asian trade route. These developments naturally increased the value of Ethiopia in European eyes, particularly in those of the republic of Venice which had long traded with the East and depended upon it for its prosperity.¹⁸⁷

The Iberian peninsula was also well aware of the existence of the far off Christian state in Africa. In 1428 King Affonso of Aragon received a letter from the Emperor Yeshaq, handed to him by two of the latter's envoys, which proposed an alliance

¹⁸⁵. *Ethiopian Itineraries*, p. 16.

¹⁸⁶. Lane-Poole, pp. 339-40.

¹⁸⁷. *Ethiopian Itineraries*, p. 11.

against Islam to be cemented by a double royal marriage. Affonso's reply is not known, but in 1450 he wrote again, this time to the Emperor Zara Yaqob, telling him that he had received Rombulo in audience and with him an Ethiopian envoy, Fra Michele.¹⁸⁸

Other travellers were also active. In 1480-3 a Franciscan mission composed of a Spaniard, Francesco Sager, Brother John of Calabria and a lay brother, Batista da Imolo, visited Ethiopia and returned home safely. A little later, in 1482, a Venetian artist called Gregorio or Hieronimo Bicini left Venice for Alexandria and subsequently made his way to Ethiopia.¹⁸⁹

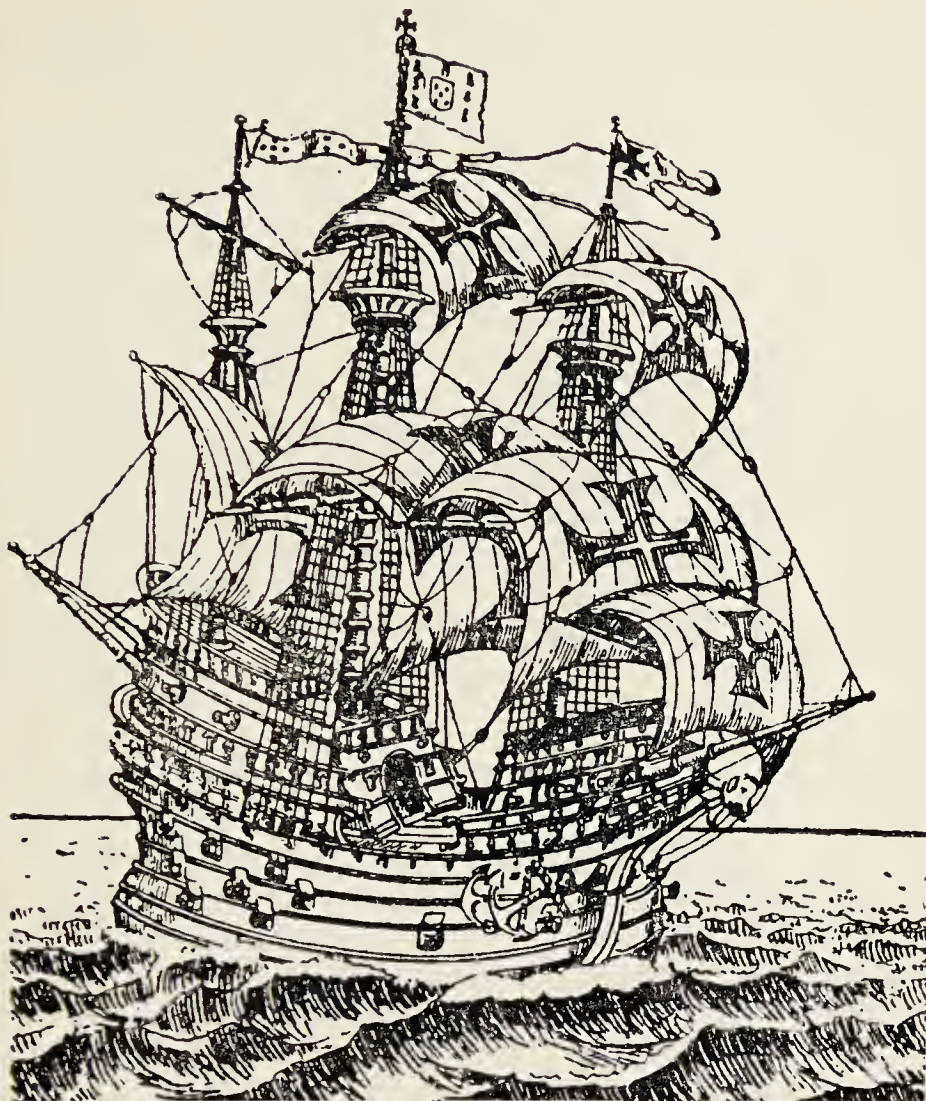
Interest in the kingdom of Prester John was further stimulated by the discoveries of the Portuguese explorers whom Prince Henry the Navigator (1394-1460) sent to discover an all sea route between Portugal and the Indies; they confirmed the prevailing view that Prester John, the great Christian monarch who ruled the mountains of the interior of the Horn of Africa, could be useful in strengthening communications with the East then largely dominated by the Arabs. In 1487 King João (John) II of Portugal dispatched Bartholomeu Dias with instructions to make contact with the Prester by sea. Dias failed in his mission, but another envoy, Pero da Covilhão (often referred to as Peter de Covilham), who landed at Zeila, was more successful: he reached the Emperor's court, but was never allowed to return to Europe.

The decision of the Portuguese to enter into diplomatic relations with Prester John is an indication that Portugal had assumed the role of a world power. Vasco da Gama rounded the Cape of Good Hope in 1497; by 1509, little more than a decade later, his compatriots had defeated a great Muslim fleet at the battle of Diu on the north-west coast of India and were the masters of most of the African coast south of the Horn of Africa, as well as of considerable areas of India and Arabia.

The Empress Regent of Ethiopia, Eleni, who ruled during the minority of the heir Lebna Dengel (Wanag Sagad 1508-1540) was fully alive to the power politics of the day. She was the daughter of a Muslim, Al Jarad Abun, the tributary ruler of Dawaro, and had only embraced Christianity on marrying

188. *ibid.*, pp. 12-6.

189. *ibid.*, p. 21.



A Portuguese Caravel depicted in 1511.

From the *Biblioteca e Museu de Marinha, Lisbon*

Lebna Dengel's grandfather the Emperor Baeda Maryam (1468–1478). Bruce holds that she was conscious of the interests both of the empire she ruled and of the neighbouring kingdom of Adal with which her father's family had been connected. She realized that only when peace prevailed between them could each prosper and merchants be free to exchange the produce of the interior with imported articles from Arabia and elsewhere.¹⁹⁰

190. Bruce, Vol. II, p. 126.

Notwithstanding her Islamic background she was deeply concerned at the rapid expansion of the Turks in the Middle East and therefore wrote to King Manoel I of Portugal in 1509 proposing an alliance for mutual defence against them. She explained that Tristão da Cunha (1460–1540), a captain in the service of the King of Portugal in the Indies, had sent two messengers to her, both of them priests, asking for food and soldiers, to assist him against the Turks.¹⁹¹ Eleni's letter to King Manoel was carried by an Armenian trader named Matthew, a person of great trust, who may once have been a friar attached to her court by licence of the Patriarch of St. Mark in Alexandria. Matthew, however, was regarded by the Portuguese with some suspicion; they asserted that he was a 'white' who falsely claimed to be the brother of the Ethiopian patriarch.¹⁹²

In 1510 the Portuguese commander Affonso d'Albuquerque (1453–1515) sent further envoys to the land of Prester John, who like their predecessors, were detained in the country. These visitors from a potential ally aroused considerable interest in Ethiopia whose rulers lived in fear of Turkish invasion. Eleni had also approached Qansuh-al-Ghawri, the last of the Mameluke Sultans of Egypt, with proposals for an alliance. Her embassy was well received, but in the year of its arrival, 1516, the sultan was killed in battle with the Turks who almost simultaneously occupied the Hijaz; they at once gave renewed life to the idea of a *jihad* against the infidels, by supplying arms to Muslim princes willing to fight against Christian Ethiopia. Such intervention was necessarily of decisive importance as the Turks now possessed muskets and artillery which gave their allies an immense advantage over peoples who only possessed lances, swords and arrows.¹⁹³ Mahfuz, the Amir of Zeila and *de facto* ruler of Adal who had long been raiding Ethiopian frontier provinces, endeavoured to undertake a full-scale invasion of the country in 1516, but was defeated and killed by Lebna Dengel who thereupon occupied much of Adal, the temporary ruin of which was completed by the Portuguese who sacked Zeila in the following year. The port of Suakin was almost simultaneously occupied by the Ottoman Emperor Selim the Great.

191. *Historiale Description de l'Ethiopie*, pp. 43–7.

192. Birch, Vol. III, pp. 250–2.

193. Alvarez, pp. 342–5; Bruce, Vol. II, p. 128.

Eleni's envoy Matthew was eventually allowed to return to Ethiopia in 1520. Doubts had been cast on his credentials at every stage, but King Manoel finally decided to send him home with an ambassador of his court, Duarte Galvan, an old man of eighty-six who died on the journey and was replaced by Rodrigo di Lima. The chaplain of this mission, which remained in Ethiopia till 1526, was Father Francisco Alvares whose famous narrative will be discussed in later pages. The mission had no major diplomatic consequences though, as we shall see, the question of the Red Sea ports which were threatened by the Turks came under discussion. The Portuguese were given permission to establish forts at Suakin, Massawa, Dahlak and Zeila but Portuguese interest in the area at this time was on the wane. As Bruce observes, the Portuguese had 'at first coveted the friendship of Abyssinia, for the sake of obtaining through it a communication with India. But they now became indifferent about that intercourse, since they had settled in India itself, and found the convenience of the passage of the Cape of Good Hope'.¹⁹⁴

Ahmad Grañ and the Portuguese

The departure of the Portuguese embassy in 1526 was the signal for the full-scale invasion of Ethiopia which had long been impending. The Ottoman Empire was in conflict with the Portuguese over the control of the sea routes and was alarmed at the possibility of a Portuguese-Ethiopian alliance. The Portuguese had destroyed Arab commerce between the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf; the Ottomans replied by occupying Suakin and Zeila and establishing friendly relations with the Muslims in Portuguese-occupied Massawa.

The Muslim population of the kingdom of Adal, the capital of which had moved to Harar, perhaps for strategic reasons, in 1520 was sharply divided on the question of attacking their Christian neighbours. According to Trimingham the people who lived in settlements and towns were reluctant to embark on war, which would inevitably be detrimental to trade, but were opposed by the newly converted Afar and Somali tribes who were 'moved by motives both religious and migrational and led by warlike *amirs*'.¹⁹⁵

194. Bruce, Vol. II, p. 159.

195. Trimingham, p. 84.

Ahmad Ibn Ibrahim El Ghazi, nicknamed Grañ or the left handed (1506–1543), the husband of Mahfuz's daughter Bati Del Wanbara, was destined to lead the warlike faction to an invasion of Ethiopia. His early years were spent struggling against Sultan Abu Bakr Ibn Mohamed, the ruler of Harar, whom he finally killed and replaced by the latter's brother, Umar Din, who ruled as Grañ's puppet. The way was then clear for him to begin what he considered his divinely appointed task: the conquest of Christian Ethiopia. Fighting began in 1527 when he refused to pay tribute to the Emperor of Ethiopia, thus making war inevitable.¹⁹⁶ Armed by the Turks with cannon, assisted by Turkish horsemen and gunners, and guided by Muslims resident in the country, he was easily able to overcome the Ethiopians who even seventy years later, we are told, had few firearms.¹⁹⁷ He began by defeating the army of the Emperor's brother-in-law Degalhan, the Governor of Bali, which was sent to punish him, and then proceeded to deal with the Somali chiefs who had refused to fall in with his plans. By building up a powerful and well equipped army which owed allegiance to himself alone he was able to overcome the opposition of those in Harar who were against war. He was then free to launch offensive after offensive against the Christians. In 1531 he occupied Dawaro and Shoa, and in 1533 Amhara and Lasta; the former Muslim kingdoms of Bali and Hadya and the Sidama and Gurage principalities were taken without much difficulty; finally in 1535 Tigre was overrun. The spearhead of this victorious army was about two hundred Turkish matchlockmen and several field pieces before whose irresistible fire power the Ethiopian armies broke like chaff before the wind. The Emperor Lebna Dengel who had earlier defeated and killed Mahfuz and had negotiated with the Portuguese on terms of equality became a hunted fugitive fleeing from one mountain fortress to another, while large numbers of Christians embraced Islam overnight to escape the wrath of the conqueror.¹⁹⁸ 'Hardly one in ten', wrote an Ethiopian chronicler, with possible exaggeration, 'retained his religion'.¹⁹⁹

196. Arab-Faqih, pp. 35–6.

197. Arab-Faqih, pp. 231–2, 234, 243, 286, 293, 295, 454, *et passim*; Almeida, p. 186.

198. Arab-Faqih, pp. 343, 347–8, 359, 363–5, 370, 453, *et passim*; Conzelman, p. 129.

199. Conzelman, p. 123.

In his distress the Emperor Lebna Dengel succeeded in smuggling out of his empire João (John) Bermudes who had been a member of the earlier Portuguese mission of 1520 and instructed him to return home in quest of Portuguese aid. Communications were hazardous as the Turks were firmly established on both sides of the Red Sea and a powerful Ottoman fleet patrolled the waters. Bermudes set forth with Antonio Fernandes and Gaspar Suriano, two 'Franks' resident in Ethiopia whom he referred to as Armenians.²⁰⁰ He carried with him a letter purporting to come from the Emperor which stated: 'all my chiefs have rebelled against me to help the Moors, and have wasted and violently taken possession of my countries.'²⁰¹

As a result of the Bermudes mission which arrived safely, and spurred on by the reports they received from vessels sailing in the Red Sea, the Portuguese decided to intervene on Ethiopia's behalf. In the course of a raid on Suez in 1541 they landed a force of four hundred picked volunteers at Massawa under the command of young Cristovão da Gama, a son of the famous Vasco.

Lebna Dengel having died the previous year Galawdewos, or Claudius (1540-1559) was the Emperor to whose assistance Cristovão da Gama came. Miguel de Castanhoso, who accompanied this expedition, relates that some while earlier when the Portuguese were anchored off Massawa they had been visited by an official of the Bahrmagash, or ruler of the sea province. He brought letters from the Emperor to the Portuguese explaining 'that his kingdoms had been for fourteen years occupied by the Moors, and that the main part of the people were in captivity; that, as the king (of Portugal), his brother, was accustomed to assist the impotent, he besought him for his own sake to send him some help.'²⁰² After landing at the coast and climbing for six days into the highlands the Portuguese, who were powerfully armed, came across Christian villages, probably in the neighbourhood of Asmara, which, Castanhoso relates, were 'depopulated through fear of the Moors', the inhabitants having abandoned their husbandry and taken refuge with their herds on a mountain; they returned to their homes, however, upon the arrival of the Portuguese.²⁰³

200. Whiteway, pp. 133-4.

201. *ibid.*, p. 107.

202. *ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

203. *ibid.*, p. 7.

Though Cristovão da Gama was soon killed with over half his men, the intervention of the Portuguese was of immense value to the Ethiopian cause, which seems, however, to have been already recovering;²⁰⁴ the whole of Tigre and the province of the Bahrnagash rallied to the Emperor's side, and Portuguese musketeers helped Galawdewos to avenge their leader. Grañ was killed on 21 February 1543, and his followers were utterly routed. The Muslim occupation came to an end almost overnight.

Victory brought with it a national renaissance in which Galawdewos endeavoured to repair the damage effected by the long years of war. He established his court at Agraro in the province of Wadj (60 km. south-west of Dessie) and built a palace and tower there; he also established a large and magnificent church, Tadbaba Mariam,²⁰⁵ a public park, an irrigation canal and a library which cost no less than ten thousand ounces of gold.²⁰⁶ He took a keen interest also in religious and literary matters, 'confuting the Franks' and promoting the translation of many books from Arabic which had become the language of the Alexandrine Church. These included the *Haymanota Abaw*, or 'Faith of the Fathers', the *Mashafa Kandil*, or 'Order of Extreme Unction for the Sick', and the *Book of Baralam and Yewasef* which was translated by Echage Enbakom (Habakkuk).²⁰⁷ This period is also important for the writing of the famous 'Confession of Faith' by Galawdewos who defined the tenets of the Ethiopian Church in reply to the Portuguese, explaining *inter alia* why his people celebrated Saturday as well as Sunday as the Sabbath.²⁰⁸

The Turks who had constantly supported Grañ's movement, determined, on the death of their protégé, to intervene directly in Ethiopian affairs. They believed, as Kammerer observes, that Ethiopia was an ideal country for conversion to Islam, the more so as their control of the Red Sea would not be secure until this had been effected.²⁰⁹ They occupied Massawa in 1557 and endeavoured for the next two decades to establish themselves on the Eritrean plateau.

Meanwhile Nur ibn al Wazir, the son of Grañ's sister, who had

204. Bruce, Vol. II, p. 175 et seq.

205. Seventy miles west of Dessie.

206. Budge, Vol. II, p. 341; Conzelman, pp. 149, 156, 174.

207. Budge, Vol. II, p. 346; Conzelman, p. 158.

208. Budge, Vol. II, pp. 353-6; Pankhurst, pp. 334-7. *Vide* also Alvarez, p. 11.

209. Kammerer, *La Mer Rouge*, Vol. III, pp. 166-7.

become Amir of Harar in 1551-2, embarked on a policy of re-organization, building a wall²¹⁰ round the city as a first step towards a war of revenge,²¹¹ and invading Fatajar in 1559. Galawdewos sent his cousin, Hamalmal, to occupy Harar; the latter forced the invading general, Sultan Barakat, to abandon the city, and shortly afterwards defeated and killed him. Nur, however, continued to advance into Ethiopian territory and succeeded in killing Galawdewos on Good Friday of the same year.²¹²

The Galla Wars

Not long after the defeat of Ahmad Grañ the Ethiopian monarchy was confronted by yet another invasion – this time by the Gallas who, as the Portuguese traveller Manoel de Almeida later observed, were ‘the scourge, not only of the Abyssinians, but also of the Moors of Adel (Adal)’. At the beginning of Grañ’s wars the Gallas appear to have been a loosely knit confederation of tribes occupying the valleys of the Webi and Juba rivers, and extending westwards beyond Lake Abaya (Margherita) to the south of present-day Ethiopia. About 1500 the expansion of the Isaq and Darod tribes of Somalis is thought to have driven the Gallas out of Ogaden and the Benadir, thus causing them to advance northwards into Ethiopia where effective opposition was afforded neither by Christians nor Muslims, both of whom had been weakened by Grañ’s campaigns. The Gallas swept forward in two main directions: from south-west Ethiopia along a corridor between Mount Walabu and Lake Abaya, and from the south up the Juba and Webi valleys.

After defeating the Emperor’s army the invading hordes occupied Bali, Dawaro (1545-7) and Fatajar. Galawdewos at first offered strong opposition and won several victories in 1554-5, but was unable to resist the flood.²¹³

In 1567 a large force of Galla invaders moved westward and laid waste the Muslim state of Harar. A three years’ famine followed and was accompanied by an epidemic which carried off large numbers of persons, among them the Emir Nur. At almost

210. This is broadly speaking the wall which stands today.

211. Trimingham, pp. 51-3.

212. *ibid.*, pp. 91-3.

213. Trimingham, pp. 93-4; Almeida, pp. 117 n, 134.

the same time other invading bands swept northward from the Webi to the Hawash, some turning north-west and others north-east, occupying the provinces of Gan and Angot and even penetrating Amhara and Begemder in the heart of the empire. Meanwhile other bands advanced toward the sources of the Gibe river and established themselves in Wallega province making Walel their sacred mountain and sweeping forward over the Sidama States into Shoa. By the time of the death of the Emperor Minas (Wanag Sagad II) in 1563 a third of the empire had been overrun, and by the beginning of the seventeenth century the southern regions of Shoa were also lost. The frontiers of the Emperor's domains were now largely on the River Abai with Galla groups established on the eastern spurs of the plateau.²¹⁴

In Harar an Ethiopian slave convert called Uthman, who had succeeded his master Amir Nur, negotiated a treaty with the invaders which Trimingham describes as 'the first attempt made to weaken the nomadic warriors with the sublimates of civilization and bring them into contact with Islamic propaganda'. Uthman promised to return all refugees to them in exchange for which they agreed to attend markets in Harari territory. The treaty, however, was soon broken by the Hararis who were bitterly opposed to it, and when in 1577 Mohamed IV of Harar launched a disastrous campaign against the Ethiopians, the Gallas seized the opportunity to surround the region, destroying no fewer than a hundred villages. The seat of the Harari sultanate was thereupon moved to the oasis of Aussa in the scorching Dankali desert which was considered less accessible to Galla raids but these nonetheless continued. Harar itself became a city state dependent on the Imam of Aussa until it declared its independence under Ali bin Daud in 1647.²¹⁵

The Galla conquest was not at first accompanied by much social or cultural assimilation: the Ethiopian Christians and the inhabitants of Adal continued their old way of life in the provinces which remained to them, while the Gallas lived as they chose in the occupied areas.

214. Trimingham, p. 94.

215. *ibid.*, p. 97.

The Later Portuguese

The dawn of victory over Grañ had meanwhile been clouded by disputes with the Portuguese. Bermudes, on returning from his mission to Portugal had at once announced that he had been appointed Patriarch of Ethiopia and that the Emperor must submit to his authority and to that of the Pope of Rome. Though the King of Portugal had refrained from acknowledging the impostor's claim, the Portuguese in Ethiopia had given him their support; in consequence fighting had broken out between the imperial forces and their former allies.²¹⁶ To bring the conflict to an end Galawdewos sent the Portuguese away from the royal camp, giving them land in the provinces and ordering them to garrison the frontier at Dawaro. Bermudes retired to Portugal and subsequently in 1565, published an account of his 'embassy' in which he revealed in passing that he and his compatriots had 'found much booty' in Ethiopia, particularly in the country of the Gafates and had returned 'rich and content'.²¹⁷

Meanwhile the Society of Jesus, which had been founded by Ignatius Loyola in 1534, had become interested in Ethiopia from Portuguese reports, and decided to undertake the conversion of its people, Loyola even volunteering to go in person. The Pope therefore entrusted to the Jesuits the task of organizing a new expedition to Ethiopia. A mission led by Andre de Oviedo landed at Arkiko in 1557 five days before the Turkish occupation of Massawa, which constituted a formidable obstacle to further communications.²¹⁸ Oviedo discredited himself by making common cause with the Turks in their invasion of 1560 and joined the ill-fated Bahrnegash Yeshaq who also allied himself with the Turkish invaders.

Despite the Turkish blockade of the coast, a Spanish Jesuit, Pero Pais, succeeded in 1603 in entering Ethiopia by a stratagem and at once opened a school without waiting like the earlier missionaries for an audience with the Emperor. Pais was a man of ability. He soon won the favour of the Emperor Za Dengel (Atnaf Sagad, 1603-1604) and induced him to espouse the Roman Catholic faith. The King's conversion was kept secret on

216. Rey, p. 200.

217. Whiteway, pp. 233-4.

218. Bruce, Vol. II, p. 198; Hyatt, p. 35; Longrigg, p. 52.

the advice of Pais who warned him against immediate disclosure. On 26 June 1604, the King wrote to Pope Clement VIII asking that Pais be confirmed as Ethiopian Patriarch and that other 'good and learned priests' be sent to assist him. He wrote at the same time to King Felipe (Philip) III of Spain proposing an alliance between their two countries to be cemented by a marriage between Felipe's daughter, aged three, and his own son aged seven.

The King's letters were intercepted and it was alleged that he had asked for troops to enforce the Roman faith. This caused a rebellion. Za Sellassie, the governor of Dambea, who had assisted the Empress in ruling the kingdom when Sartsa Dengel (Malak Sagad I, 1563-1597) died, announced his intention of deposing Za Dengel and of placing on the throne Yaqob, the young son of Sartsa Dengel. Za Dengel was killed in battle. However Yaqob on being enthroned entered into negotiations with Pais. Consequently there were large-scale desertions from his forces and Susneyos, a grandson of Lebna Dengel, claimed the throne, scoring an easy victory.

Susneyos (Malak Sagad III or Seltan Sagad I, 1607-1632) was the first Emperor of Ethiopia to have close contact with the Gallas. He had been seized in his youth by Borana Gallas who had overrun the place where he lived; though rescued after a year he later spent some time on the Galla frontier where he learned the art of war. He married a Galla princess, Weled Saala. On the death of Za Dengel he declared himself the rightful heir to the throne and marched northward against Yaqob at the head of an army of Gallas to establish his claim by the sword.²¹⁹

Pais had remained aloof from the struggle, but as soon as victory went to Susneyos, the priest gave him full support and began working systematically and adroitly by teaching Ethiopian children, by building churches, by dangling before him the prospect of a military alliance with Spain, always on condition that he would submit himself and his country to the Church of Rome. In due course the clever prelate succeeded: Susneyos confided in him his willingness to write to the Pope acknowledging his supremacy and to King Felipe of Spain asking for troops to assist him in enforcing the new faith. Pais did not long survive his victory.

Affonso Mendes, his successor, another Spanish Jesuit whom Budge sums up as 'rigid, uncompromising, narrow-minded and intolerant',²²⁰ was a far less able man. He tried to convert the country by force, insisting that the Ethiopian priests should be reordained, the churches reconsecrated, the people rebaptized, the fasts and festivals rearranged according to the Roman calendar, the liturgy remodelled and circumcision prohibited. The Ethiopians had for almost two centuries celebrated Saturday as well as Sunday and had quoted the gospels as their authority for doing so.²²¹ Mendes ordered the Emperor to punish any employers who failed to make their people work on the Saturday. A proclamation was accordingly issued which stated, according to Bruce, 'that all outdoor work, such as ploughing and sowing, should be publicly followed by the husbandman on the Saturday, under penalty of paying a web of cotton cloth, for the first omission, which cloth was to be of five shillings value; and the second offence was to be punished by a confiscation of moveables, and the crimes were not to be pardoned for seven years.'²²² What gave the greatest offence was the order by Mendes to disinter and throw out the remains of revered Ethiopian ecclesiastics who had been buried in the churches. Such demands and policies naturally evoked stubborn resistance from a proud people unwilling to bow to alien pressure.²²³

The Expulsion of the Jesuits

When Mendes met with resistance from the Ethiopian Church and people he called upon the Emperor, whom he had induced to make a public confession of faith, to establish by force the doctrines and practices of the Roman Church. Those who still clung to the old faith and ritual were persecuted. Revolt after revolt broke out. The Gallas naturally seized the opportunity to encroach further on the country. At last, wearied by the executions of his friends and relatives he had himself ordered and the wars he had waged against the people under the imperative

220. *ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 390.

221. For a discussion on the Sabbath see the Confession of the Emperor Galawdewos, Budge, Vol. II, pp. 353-6; Pankhurst, pp. 334-7.

222. Bruce, Vol. II, p. 338.

223. Ludolphus, p. 339-44; Budge, Vol. II, p. 390. *Vide* also Wansleben, pp. 23-6.

orders of Mendes, Susneyos abandoned the Jesuits. On 14 June 1632 he issued the following proclamation: 'Hear Ye! Hear Ye! We first gave you this faith believing it to be good. But innumerable people have been slain, Julius, Gabriel, Takla Giorgis, Sartsa Kristos and now these peasants. For which reason we restore to you the faith of your forefathers. Let the former clergy return to the churches, let them put in their altars, let them say their own liturgy. And do you rejoice.'²²⁴ After this admission of failure he abdicated in favour of his son Fasiladas²²⁵ (Alam Sagad or Seltan Sagad II, 1632-1667) who proceeded to banish the Jesuits first to Fremona and later from all Ethiopia.

These events were welcomed with great enthusiasm throughout the land. 'It is a thing almost impossible to be believed,' wrote the learned Ludolphus, 'with what an Universal Joy the Emperor's Edict was receiv'd among the People. The whole Camp, as if they had some great Deliverance from the Enemy, rang with Shouts and Acclamations. The Monks and Clergy, who had felt the greatest weight of the Fathers' Hatred lifted up their Thankful voices to Heaven. The promiscuous Multitude of Men and Women danc'd and caper'd; the Soldiers wish'd all happiness to their Commanders; they broke to pieces their own and the Rosaries of all they met.

'Others ran about Singing for joy that *Ethiopia* was deliver'd from the *Western Lyons*, Chanting forth the following Lines

'At length the Sheep of Ethiopia free'd
From the Bold Lyons of the West
Securely in their Pastures feed;
St. Mark and Cyril's Doctrine have o'recome
The Folly's of the Church of Rome.
Rejoyce, rejoyce, Sing Hallelujahs all,
No more the Western Wolves
Our Ethiopia shall enthrall.

'And thus', Ludolphus concludes, 'fell the whole Fabrick of the *Roman Religion* that had bin so long rearing with so much Labour and Expense, and which had cost the Effusion of so much Blood to pull down.'²²⁶

Mendes on reaching India sent a petition to the King of Spain

224. Tellez, p. 242.

225. The Ethiopian form of the name Basilides.

226. Ludolphus, pp. 357-8.

stating that the only means of converting Ethiopia would be by a military occupation of the country.²²⁷ 'He declared it his opinion that Massawa and Arkiko ought to be seized, a strong citadel to be built, and maintained by a numerous garrison. That one of the princes of Abyssinia ought to be got into Catholic hands, by winning over or conquering the commander who kept him prisoner; that he ought to be set on the throne, and a civil war by that means be raised in Abyssinia.'²²⁸

To make doubly certain that the Portuguese should not again intervene in the country Fasiladas entered into treaties with the Pashas of Massawa and Suakin, both of whom agreed to close their ports to any European attempting to enter the Ethiopian realm. He also kept emissaries at those ports, as well as at Mocha, to report on the arrival of ships likely to be carrying his Portuguese enemies. To encourage trade,²²⁹ however, he tried to negotiate an alliance with the Sultan of Turkey, the Grand Mogul, Arungzeb (1659-1707), with the Imam of the Yaman and with the King of Adal. Aurungzeb accepted a gift of horses and ivory and in return presented him with a valuable manuscript of the *Koran* and two thousand rupees to be spent in rebuilding the mosque at Gondar which he believed the Portuguese had destroyed; the Imam of Yaman also sent a mission in 1648 though popular opposition caused the Emperor to dismiss it with costly gifts. The King of Adal, on the other hand, brushed aside the hand of friendship, attacked the Ethiopian army and overran Ethiopia's eastern provinces.²³⁰

The Portuguese appear to have been disliked throughout the coastal areas of Africa which they held with a grip of iron. A Portuguese inscription of 1639 may still be read at Fort Jesus, Mombasa, which tells how its commander subdued all the rebels of the nearby coast and 'personally inflicted on Pate and Siu a punishment hitherto unknown in India, even to the razing of their walls'; the inscription added that he had 'punished the Nyika and chastised Pemba and its rebellious people, putting to death on his own responsibility the rebel kings and all the principal chiefs'.²³¹ Discussing the Portuguese conquest of this

227. Beccari, Vol. XII, letters 13 and 23; Ludolphus, p. 365.

228. Lobo, p. 159.

229. Peiser, p. 46.

230. Budge, Vol. II, pp. 401, 403; Trimmingham, p. 102.

231. Coupland, p. 65.

area, Coupland declares that it 'made no positive mark' though 'if physical conditions, especially climate, had been different, the Portuguese might have tried to do in East Africa what they had succeeded in doing in Brazil. As it was, their rule was external; it was never identified with the interests of the country; it was only maintained by force, and that force was only used to obtain immediate profit from a monopoly or restriction of trade. The coast was never occupied, except by little garrisons. . . . In every way, in fact, Portuguese rule was as profitless to the inhabitants of East Africa . . . as it was to the Portuguese themselves'.²³²

In the last analysis the Portuguese – the Jesuits perhaps excepted – were less interested in Africa than in Asia, and regarded the African coast largely as a source of slaves and as a series of stations on the long sea route to the East. For this reason they paid less attention to the Red Sea which was in any case under effective Turkish control than to the Indian Ocean coast of the Horn of Africa, which lay on the main line of communications with their possessions in India.

The Establishment of Gondar and the Decline of the Monarchy

The reign of Fasiladas (1632–1667) was notable for his decision in 1636 to establish his permanent residence at Gondar, a place which his father, Susneyos, had already used for a time as the seat of government.²³³ The establishment of a fixed capital was a significant departure from tradition, for it had become customary for the Emperor's headquarters to move from place to place every few years. Gondar rapidly emerged as an important political and economic centre and had a profound influence on Ethiopian history. Larger, by far, than any other town it was also culturally the most important: architecture, music and poetry, literature, painting and calligraphy flourished.

The splendid buildings of Gondar were of brown basalt with ornament of local wine-coloured tuff. Their fortress-like appearance and the use of mortar were new to Ethiopia, but the buildings contained traditional architectural features harking back to Aksum in pre-Christian and Christian times, to the rock-hewn churches of Lalibela and to other earlier and later structures.²³⁴

²³². *ibid.*, p. 70.

²³³. Perruchon, *Règne de Fasiladas*, p. 86.

²³⁴. Pankhurst, p. 567.

As time passed the style of building developed from the rugged grandeur of the Fasiladas castle to the elegance of the palace of the Empress Mentuab in Gondar itself and, nearby, to her residence and the monastic church at Qesquam. The stately architecture was often adorned by beautiful paintings, and handsome illuminated manuscripts were made for the churches and nobles. In poetry and music, which were always associated, the school of Gondar became pre-eminent having no rival save that of nearby Wadela. The city of Gondar was renowned for its secular songs and several Gondarine poets achieved a nation-wide reputation.²³⁵

In the eighteenth century the power of the Emperors declined and the Gallas gradually increased their influence at Gondar. Asma Giyorgis (1721–1730), better known as Bakaffa or ‘the Inexorable’, came to the throne after a decade and a half of weak government comprising no fewer than five reigns. He succeeded in strengthening the position of the throne at the expense of the nobles who had become too powerful, but showed great favour to a humble Galla, Kasmati Waragna, whom he raised to a position of trust.²³⁶ Bakaffa’s son Iyasu II (Adyam Sagad II, 1730–1755) was the last Emperor to exercise effective authority; he was nicknamed ‘the Little’ in contrast to his grandfather, Iyasu ‘the Great’. During his minority many serious revolts broke out. The Queen Mother, Mentuab (Wallata Giyorgis) wielded power for her infant son, drawing on the support of her four brothers and the faithful Galla minister, Waragna. The appointment of her relatives to the best posts aroused the resentment of the other nobles whose power she was unable to restrain. Later in the reign, Mikael Schul, Governor of Tigre, emerged as the strongest force in the land; ruling an important province on the direct route to the coast, he controlled the bulk of Ethiopia’s external trade; he enriched himself from the customs dues and was able to obtain the best arms imported into the realm. When Iyasu died in 1755 it became apparent that the country was on the eve of political change. As a young man he had married an Amhara lady, but the Queen Mother, Mentuab, fearing that his wife would ally herself with the hostile nobles, had banished her with her two sons to the fortress of Wehni; Mentuab had then

235. *ibid.*, pp. 246–7.

236. Budge, Vol. II, pp. 445–6.

arranged a dynastic alliance with the Gallas by marrying Iyasu to Emmabet²³⁷ Wabi also known as Bazabeh, the daughter of the Wollo Galla chief, Amitzo, to whom Bakaffa had once fled for refuge.

Iyasu was succeeded by Iyoas (Adyam Sagad III, 1755-1769), whose mother the Galla princess, ousted the old Queen Mother, Mentuab, with the help of her Galla compatriots whom, since the time of her marriage, she had been bringing into the city. She in turn ruled on behalf of her young son with the help of Waragna and other Galla ministers. The Emperor was little more than a Galla puppet; he spoke Gallinya which now tended to replace Amharic at the palace. The capital was guarded by three thousand Galla troops, and became in fact virtually a Galla town. Lubo, brother of the Empress Regent, was nominated Governor of Amhara province, but his appointment had to be withdrawn because of popular opposition. Her brother, Brulhé (Biralle) was made Governor of Begemder, but was killed in attempting to establish himself there.

In face of overwhelming popular opposition to the appointment of Galla newcomers to the most important offices of state, Iyoas found himself obliged to appeal to Mikael for assistance and conferred on him the title of Ras. Mikael thereupon occupied Gondar with an army of twenty-six thousand men, ten thousand of whom were armed with muskets – a formidable army for the time. He thus became master of the city. The Emperor, however, continued to support the Gallas. Yemariam Barea, a prominent Amhara nobleman and the Governor of Begemder, endeavoured to resist the advance to power of the young Emperor's Galla uncles, but was defeated by the imperial forces and subsequently killed. Soon afterwards Mikael, to consolidate his power, ordered that twenty thousand Galla troops which had been brought from Bizamo to the neighbourhood of the capital be sent back to their own locality. Their commander Fasil, the son of Waragna, refused and, secretly supported by the Emperor, made preparations to resist the order. Iyoas commanded Mikael to return to Tigre, but instead of doing so the latter attacked and defeated Fasil. Discovering that Iyoas had secretly supported Fasil, and was conspiring against him, Mikael

237. *Emmabet*, an Ethiopian word roughly equivalent to 'the Honourable' but only used for women.

had him deposed and subsequently murdered, and placed on the throne in his stead Yohannes II (1769), a brother of Bakaffa. This old man survived but a few months and was succeeded by his young son Takla Haymanot II (1769-1777) – who was reigning when the Scottish traveller, James Bruce of Kinnaird, reached Gondar.

The monarchy was thus in a period of supreme difficulty in which its authority progressively declined during the so-called era of the *masefint* (or princes) until the latter half of the nineteenth century when its power again began to revive.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL LIFE

1300-1800

Chapter 1

Economic and Social Life, 1300-1800

MARCO POLO (1254-1324), whose *Travels* appeared in 1298, was, as we have seen, but the first of a number of writers to touch upon economic and social conditions in Ethiopia in the Middle Ages. His account of the ancient African realm was followed in the fourteenth century by the more authoritative remarks of such writers as Giovanni da Carignano, Pietro Rombulo, Ibn Battuta and Ibn Fadl Allah, each of whom makes a real contribution to our understanding of the subject.

The general picture which can be discerned in outline in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries acquires greater depth and clarity during the following two hundred years. The chronicle of the Emperor Zara Yaqob (1434-1468) throws considerable light on the system of government and other problems of his reign. The Ethiopian monks in Jerusalem and Rome, who had long focused attention on their distant motherland, provided much other information which has been preserved by a number of interested persons. Among these the most active was Alessandro Zorzi, a Venetian, who recorded the routes by which the Ethiopians he met in Italy had reached Jerusalem, together with other data, in a document which has recently been edited for the Hakluyt Society by the late O. G. S. Crawford and constitutes a useful guide for the study of Ethiopian geography and trade in the period from 1470 to 1524.

The almost contemporary appearance in East African waters of a series of Portuguese and other European travellers rendered obsolete the meagre and sometimes garbled observations of earlier travellers and supplemented the information given by Zorzi. These voyagers of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century left to posterity valuable eye-witness descriptions of the commerce of the Horn of Africa. Among early visitors in this period mention should be made of the Italian traveller, Ludovico di Varthema who visited the Red Sea area during the period 1503-1508; Affonso Albuquerque, second Portuguese Governor of

India, whose *Commentaries*, which cover the years from 1480 to 1515, were later prepared from his dispatches by his son; Tomé Pires, a Portuguese apothecary who subsequently served as ambassador to China, and wrote an account of the Red Sea trade for the period 1512–1515; the Florentine, Andrea Corsali, who served with the Portuguese navy and wrote a letter to Duke Lorenzo dei Medici on 18 September 1517, on conditions in the area; and the Portuguese traveller, Duarte Barbosa, whose memoirs written in 1518 describe the state of trade along the Red Sea coast as he saw it when he sailed there with his country's fleet.

Our earliest glimpse of the Ethiopian hinterland through Portuguese eyes is to be found through the pages of a work entitled *Carta das novas a el Rey nosso Senhor do descobrimento do preste Johan*. Written about 1521 it gives some useful information on the government and trade of the coastal strip. This document diminishes in importance, however, when placed beside the subsequent record of the first Portuguese mission to penetrate into the interior of the empire; the mission landed at the port of Arkiko in 1520, during the reign of the Emperor Lebna Dengel (1508–1540),¹ and remained in the country for six years. In 1540 its chaplain, Francisco Alvares, published a *Narrative* which was destined to be one of the two most remarkable Portuguese works on the Ethiopian realm.

Since Alvares and his companions lived in the country for a number of years his report is much more accurate than those of earlier writers, many of whom based themselves largely on hearsay or on what they could discover in the immediate vicinity of the coast. Moreover he went to considerable trouble to give a well-balanced description of Ethiopian life, and provides a fairly detailed picture of the economic and social condition of the ancient realm at the end of the Middle Ages. The absence of any comparable documentation for previous centuries makes it impossible to prove that all the phenomena he describes were of long standing though references to many of them are to be found in the fragmentary testimony of earlier commentators. Alvares and his compatriots, it should be noted, were comparing Ethiopia with Portugal and neighbouring European states as they knew them in their own day. Coming from a country which had long possessed a fixed capital, a number of towns which were

1. Also called Dawit or David II and Wanag Sagad I.

large by sixteenth-century standards and a more or less highly evolved system of commerce, they were naturally somewhat surprised by the absence of such features in Ethiopia. On the other hand since they wrote before the agricultural and industrial revolutions in Europe the comparisons they drew between the Ethiopian and Portuguese economies were more favourable to the African State than were the accounts of European writers a couple of centuries or so later. Economically Portugal was not, after all, so very different from Ethiopia; there was no possibility of writing of 'underdeveloped' countries as the whole world was still more or less underdeveloped.

Alvares was obviously a careful narrator and though some of his statements were questioned at one time or another his observations upon which doubt were cast have mainly been vindicated by subsequent investigations. His narrative throws light on most aspects of Ethiopian life. It provides valuable information on the extent of the realm on the very eve of the terrible invasion of Ahmad Grañ. It describes a system of government in which the Emperor, his court and followers, marched as a great army from place to place instead of establishing a permanent capital, other members of the royal family being banished to a flat-topped mountain to prevent them from challenging the supreme authority. It suggests that though this roving court life prevented the growth of large cities the country was nonetheless rich and populous, as is confirmed both by the account of the Emperor's revenues from the principal provinces and by the detailed descriptions of agriculture, animal husbandry and internal and external trade in what was evidently a flourishing economy. Though impressed by the great prosperity of the land, Alvares also refers to the difficulties of communication which hampered the development of commerce. He mentions the use of salt which throughout Ethiopian history has been perhaps the most important though a very inconvenient means of exchange, and the slave trade which was at that time, as for centuries before and after, draining away the population of various parts of the Horn of Africa. Reference is also made to the significance of the Church, its ownership of land and its role in education, as well as to housing conditions, clothing, food and drink, and the more common diseases and the remedies in use. Finally, the Emperor's letters to the Portuguese, which are quoted in the *Narrative*, reveal

Lebna Dengel's preoccupation not only with the Turkish menace to his realm, but also with the need for economic development which, like many of his successors, he hoped to achieve with the aid of foreign technicians.

Material on economic and social conditions during the subsequent decades of conflict can be drawn both from native chronicles, which cover all the reigns of this period, and from the writings of foreign travellers. Arab-Faqih, the chronicler of the great Muslim warrior, Ahmad Grañ, though mainly concerned with the story of conquest and pillage, makes passing references to the wealth of the Christian lands occupied by his master, while the chronicler of the Emperor Galawdewos (Claudius) tells us something of the subsequent era of reconstruction. The Portuguese expedition of Cristovão da Gama, which led to the defeat of Grañ, also produced some documentation: two of its members, Miguel de Castanhoso and João Bermudes, have left descriptions of their visit to the country in the years between 1541 and 1543. A contemporary record by the Portuguese traveller, João de Castro, who landed at Massawa in 1541, affords further information on the southern Red Sea trade of the period.

The Ethiopic work, or, as Stephen Wright suggests, *précis* of a work,² *Zenahu la-Galla*, written in 1592 or 1593 by an Ethiopian monk called Bahrey, whose home in Gamo was destroyed by Galla invaders, provides interesting data on the military organization of both sides and gives us insight into the social structure of Christian Ethiopia at this time.

This document may be supplemented by the important account of the Portuguese Jesuit, Manoel de Almeida, who lived in Ethiopia from 1624, two years after Susneyos' submission to Rome, until the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1633. His *History of High Ethiopia or Abassia*, which was written some eighty years after the defeat of Grañ in 1543, is more systematically arranged than the *Narrative* of Alvares and covers a somewhat wider range of subjects, including the method of government, the administration of justice, the organization of the army and the economic and social effects of war.

A comparison between the two works is instructive. It indicates the extent to which the empire had suffered from the invasion of Grañ and the subsequent incursion of the Gallas, for in Almeida's

2. *Vide Africa*, Vol. XXVI.

day the Emperor controlled no more than 'the half of what his predecessors possessed'.³ The Turkish occupation of Massawa, moreover, had increased the isolation of the ancient realm and had further endangered its already insecure trade route to the sea, rendering it almost impossible for Ethiopians to engage in overseas commerce. Continual warfare, added to the loss of so many provinces and the decline of trade, had inevitably affected the prosperity of the country. The Emperor's treasures and annual revenue had shrunk considerably; and innumerable churches and the immense wealth accumulated in them had been destroyed. Nature, on the other hand, had been kind, for the agricultural prosperity which Alvares had witnessed soon returned to the war-torn land enabling the primarily agricultural people of Ethiopia to resume their age old way of life. One cannot indeed peruse the two narratives without being struck by the extent to which the traditions and customs of the Ethiopians survived the cruel blows inflicted on them in this period of conflict.

Almeida's study is corroborated and supplemented by the works of his fellow Jesuit missionaries, Jerome Lobo, Affonso Mendes, Pero Pais, Gaspar Pais, Manoel Barradas, and Baltazar Telles, as well as by those of the Italian traveller Giacomo Baratti. Whatever their aims may have been they were almost all first-rate observers.

Contemporary Chinese records and the work of modern sinologists and archaeologists also contribute to our knowledge of the Horn of Africa's foreign trade in early times. Though commerce between China and Africa was mainly restricted to the Somali area and the coast of what is now Kenya and Tanganyika, and though it never reached the magnitude of Egyptian, Indian or Arab trade in this region, it is nevertheless of considerable interest, the more so as Chinese records, despite their inaccuracy, are richer in this period than those of most other countries. They have much to tell us about the Somali coastal trade, and the information provided confirms, by and large, what we gathered from the *Periplus*. In the intervening centuries there appears to have been little change in the articles of foreign trade.

For our knowledge of this time we are also greatly indebted

3. Almeida, p. 13.

to the virtual founder of Ethiopic studies in Europe, the Saxon scholar Hiob Ludolf (1624-1704) often known as Ludolphus, who though interested in knowledge for its own sake also persevered in his great work in the belief that it would be useful to his countrymen for purposes of trade.⁴ In addition to reading the principal available works on the country he used information given to him by an Ethiopian scholar, Abba Gorgorius, or Gregory, who had been obliged to leave Ethiopia because of his association with the Jesuits, and arrived in Rome in 1649 where he was maintained at the expense of the Pope in the Ethiopian College which had been established there over a century earlier. Having followed the Jesuits to India after their expulsion in 1633, he attempted to resettle in Ethiopia but animosity against the Roman Catholics was so strong that he was put in prison and was allowed to escape abroad only through the Emperor's intervention. The information he was able to offer Ludolphus was therefore mainly based on the situation in Jesuit times although some sixteen years elapsed before Ludolphus gathered it. In the preface to the second English edition, dated 1684, of his *New History of Ethiopia* which first appeared in Latin in 1681, Ludolphus tells us that in reply to a request for additional data about himself his Ethiopian informant wrote to him on 16 October 1650: 'My Beloved Friend, Let not my Family seem to you to be of a low condition; for it is of the Amharican (Amhara) House, of the Lineage of Nobles, who are Governours of the Ethiopian People, Princes, Generals, and Councillors of the King of Kings of Ethiopia; . . . I also have been conversant with the King, Princes and Nobles, etc.'

Gregory, many of whose letters have been subsequently published, was an invaluable friend and assistant. Having seen Europe's great cities, the advanced state of its industries and communications and the agricultural improvements which were being put into practice on that continent, he inevitably looked on his motherland with a critical eye. This attitude is reflected in many a page of the *New History* which emphasizes more clearly than earlier works the essentially rural nature of Ethiopian life, the preponderance of farming and pasturage, the absence of large towns, the almost insuperable difficulties of communication and the failure of the native population to engage in trading

4. Flemming, pp. 547, 96.

pursuits. In his concluding chapter, the author pleads for greater contact with Europe and the adoption of new techniques. 'The best Merchandise in Habessinia,' he argues, 'and the most important for the Prince, were a more cultivated Ingenuity of the People; together with a perfect knowledge of the Latine language together with addition of our Arts and Handicrafts Trades, which would advance the Affairs of these poor Christians to a more flourishing Estate, and weaken the strength of the Barbarians.'⁵

Though the Ethiopian chronicles tend to be concerned mainly with political, religious, or military matters, some of the later ones produced during the period of isolation from European contacts following the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1633, are of greater economic and social interest. The chronicles of the reigns of Yohannes I, Iyasu I, Bakaffa, Iyasu II and Iyoas, published by Dr. I. Guidi, are probably the most informative in this respect as they afford us glimpses of the system of government, the character of internal and external trade, and the method of taxation before and at the time of the decline of the monarchy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. They also contain significant references to the health of the population and to the outbreak of various epidemics and famines.

As in earlier times these indigenous works may be supplemented from foreign sources. The Yamani Ambassador, Hasan bin Ahmad el Haimi, who visited the court of Fasiladas in 1648 has left a lively account of the countryside and capital as seen through Muslim eyes. Later in the seventeenth century we have the diplomatic correspondence of the French Consul in Cairo, M. Charles de Maillet, who took a keen interest in Ethiopian foreign trade in the period 1698-1707, and the journal of Dr. Charles Poncet who arrived in Gondar in July 1699 to cure the Emperor Iyasu I (Adyam Sagad, 1682-1706) and one of his sons who were suffering from a troublesome skin disease. Poncet's visit, which lasted till September 1700 brought to an end a period of sixty-six years of isolation from European contacts; it resulted from the fact that the Jesuits, who had not forgotten their past failure in Ethiopia, conceived the idea of persuading King Louis XIV of France to send an embassy to its Emperor, arguing that the conversion of the far-off African empire would add *éclat* to

5. Ludolphus, p. iv. *Vide* also Flemming, pp. 88-97.

DATE	SOVEREIGNS	HISTORICAL SOURCES (EXCLUDING ETHIOPIAN CHRONICLES)
1200	LALIBELA -1230 ?	CHAU JU-KUA; <u>TRADE MANUAL</u> 1226
50	NAAKUTO LAAB -1270 YEKUNO AMLAK 1270-85 YAGBEA TSEYON 1285-94 Five other Emperors 1294-9	
1300	WEDEM ARAD 1299-1314 AMD A TSEYON I 1314-44	MARCO POLO; <u>TRAVELS</u> 1298 CHU-SSU-PEN and KUAN-YU-TU; <u>MONGOL ATLAS</u> ca. 1300 CARIGNANO interviews Ethiopian mission in Genoa, 1306 IBN BATTUTA 1330 in Mecca; <u>TRAVELS</u>
50	NEWAYA KRISTOS 1344-72	IBN FADL ALLAH d. 1349; <u>GEOGRAPHY</u>
1400	NEWAYA MARIAM 1372-82 DAWIT I 1382-1411 TEWODROS I 1411-4 YESHAQ 1414-29 Four other Emperors 1429-34	ROMBULO visits Ethiopia 1407; reported by RANZANO 1450 MAQRIZI; <u>HISTORY</u> 1434-5
50	ZARA YAQOB 1434-68	FRA MAURO; <u>MAP</u> 1460 ZORZI interviews Ethiopians in Rome 1470-1524 ALBUQUERQUE sails in Red Sea 1480-1515; <u>DESCRIPTION</u> SURIANO visits Ethiopia 1482 Red Sea <u>TRAVELS</u> ; HARFF 1496-9; VARTHEMA 1503-8; PIRES 1512-13; CORSALE 1517; BARBOSA 1518 ALVARES 1520-6; <u>TRAVELS</u> ; CARTA DAS NOVAS 1521 ARAB FAQH; <u>CHRONICLE</u> 1527-43 CASTRO in Red Sea 1541 CASTANHOSO and BERMUDEZ; <u>TRAVELS</u> 1541-3
1500	BAEDA MARIAM 1468-78 ESKENDER 1478-94 AMD A TSEYON II 1494 NAOD 1494-1508 LEENA DENGEL 1508-50	
50	GALAWDEWOS 1540-59 MINAS 1559-63 SARTSA DENGEL 1563-97	BAHREY; <u>HISTORY OF THE GALLAS</u> 1592-3 JESUIT <u>TRAVELS</u> and <u>HISTORY</u> ; P. PAIS 1603-22; G. PAIS 1616-22; ALMEIDA 1622-32; LOBO 1622-32; BARRADAS 1623-33; MENDES 1625-33 EL HAIMI; <u>DIPLOMATIC REPORT</u> 1648 GREGORY-LUDOLPHUS; <u>CORRESPONDENCE</u> 1650 BARATTI; <u>TRAVELS</u> 1655 TELLES; <u>HISTORY</u> 1660 LUDOLPHUS; <u>HISTORY</u> 1681
1600	YAQOB 1597-1603 ZA DENGEL & YAQOB 1803-7 SUSNEYOS 1607-32	MAILLET; <u>CORRESPONDENCE</u> 1698-1707 PONCET 1699-1700; <u>TRAVELS</u>
50	FASILADAS 1632-67 YOHANNES I 1667-82 IYASU I 1682-1706	
1700	TAKLA HAYMANOT I 1706-8 TEWOFLOS 1706-8 YOSTOS 1708-11 DAWIT III 1716-21 BAKAFFA 1721-30 IYASU II 1730-55	
50	IYOAS I 1755-69	BRUCE 1768-73; <u>TRAVELS</u> and <u>HISTORY</u>
1800	TAKLA HAYMANOT II 1769-77 Period of the Masafent	ABRAM; <u>CONVERSATION</u> in Calcutta, reported by JONES 1788

Chart showing principal sovereigns and periods covered by the historical sources referred to in the text.

the court of the Roi-Soleil. It was decided that Louis XIV should send an envoy to explain the advantages of an alliance with the greatest European power of that time; Ethiopia, it was hoped, would send an embassy to Versailles together with a number of young Ethiopian nobles, men and women, to be educated at the French court. M. de Maillet, the Consul in Cairo, was instructed to select a suitable envoy. Having learnt that the Emperor was suffering from a skin complaint and had sent an agent, Haji Ali, to Cairo in quest of a doctor, de Maillet approached this emissary and told him that Dr. Poncet, a member of the local French community, was the ideal choice and a man of great reputation. It was therefore arranged that this physician should return to Ethiopia with Haji Ali in the dual role of doctor and diplomatist. A Jesuit, Father C. F. X. de Brevedent, was added to the party disguised as Poncet's servant, but he died before reaching the Emperor's court. Poncet's mission was medically a complete success, but it failed politically through a number of fortuitous circumstances: on his way back to Cairo the Frenchman encountered innumerable difficulties and his expedition closed in an undignified conflict between himself and de Maillet. Historically, however, his journey was important for it gave the outside world some information about the country during the period of its isolation, when the great city of Gondar was built. Poncet was the first European observer to describe the city, the existence of which was doubted in European circles where it was generally thought that Ethiopia still possessed no fixed capital. His narrative also contains useful data on Ethiopia's communications with the Sudan, as well as with the Red Sea port of Massawa.

Poncet saw Gondar in the heyday of its magnificence under the rule of an Emperor who won from his people the designation of Iyasu the Great and was regarded with respect in the neighbouring kingdom of Sennar. The French doctor wrote with admiration of the new palace with 'more than twenty rooms', the throne with feet of 'massy gold' placed in an alcove surmounted by a dome all shining with gold and azure. The sovereign reclined on great cushions embroidered in gold; the 'great lords', richly dressed, were ranged on either side. Poncet was impressed by the ceremonial grandeur of court functions; the Emperor attended early morning church service marching in .

procession under a splendid canopy followed by his courtiers and accompanied by the playing of musical instruments 'making a good agreeable harmony'. The Abuna in his ecclesiastical robes wrought with gold crosses awaited the Emperor at the church door with nearly a hundred priestly attendants clad in white.⁶

The Scottish traveller, James Bruce of Kinnaird, the last of the major sources on which this study is based, arrived at Gondar three-quarters of a century later than Poncet. He saw the city under very different circumstances in the midst of a grave epidemic of smallpox and oppressed by the gloom of impending civil war. While serving as British Consul in Algiers he had conceived the idea of journeying to Ethiopia to discover the source of the Nile. Before leaving for East Africa he had enlisted the help of the Coptic Patriarch in Egypt who had put him in touch with Church dignitaries in Ethiopia. The Patriarch had also introduced him to Metical Aga, a Muslim of probity and importance in Massawa, and to Janni, a Greek in high esteem in Ethiopia.

Having already learnt Arabic Bruce had acquired a useful knowledge of Geez with the aid of the works of Ludolphus and subsequently picked up some Amharic. From a British surgeon in Algiers he had obtained the rudiments of 'the art of bleeding', 'the manner of applying several sorts of bandages' and 'an idea of dressing sores and wounds'. He had also received 'frequent and very useful lessons' in Aleppo which had 'improved' him in the 'knowledge of physic and surgery'. Thus equipped he flattered himself that 'he occasioned no greater mortality' abroad than some of his 'brother physicians' at home.

During his five years' residence in the country from 1768 to 1773 he became acquainted with all the principal personalities at the Ethiopian court and was on friendly, even cordial terms with several of them. His spell at Gondar was long enough for him to devote much time to the study of Ethiopian history and to obtain a vivid, if not always accurate impression of Ethiopian society at the period. He is the last European traveller to describe the Ethiopian way of life before the dawn of the nineteenth century. Despite its defects, and though it lacks the accuracy and comprehensive character of some later studies, and was not written until almost twenty years after he left Ethiopia, his book

6. Poncet, p. 118.

presents some idea of the country at the eve of the great expansion of European trade and influence which accompanied the industrial revolution in Europe. It may be supplemented by probably more trustworthy extracts from his original notes which are included in the later editions.

Reference will also be made in the pages which follow to an Ethiopian called Abram who travelled to Calcutta and described the city of Gondar to the orientalist, Sir William Jones, who was so impressed with this corroboration of Poncet's account that he published it in 1788, two years before the appearance of Bruce's five-volume work.

Chapter 2

The Geography and Frontier of the Realm

AS ALREADY suggested the outside world's knowledge of the geography of Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa in the Middle Ages was vague in the extreme. The Arab geographer Al Idrisi, writing before 1154, mentioned a handful of places few of which can now be identified. A century or so later, in 1298, the Venetian traveller, Marco Polo, summed up the geographical data he had been able to acquire in less than a dozen sentences:

'You must know', he wrote, 'that Abash (Abyssinia) is a very large province and constitutes Middle India. You must also know that the chief king of all this province is a Christian. All the other kings of the province are subject to him; they are six — three Christians and three Saracens (Muslims). The chief king resides in the centre of the province; the Saracens live towards Aden.

'You must know that in the province of Abash, there are excellent soldiers, and many horsemen. They have great numbers of horses. And it is well for them that this is so, for they have to fight with the Sultan of Aden (Adal), with that of Nubia, and with many more besides. On account of this constant practice in arms, they are deemed the best soldiers of all the provinces of India.'¹

Marco Polo was soon superseded as an authority by the Genoese cartographer, Giovanni da Carignano, who, on the basis of interviews with an Ethiopian ecclesiastical delegation which visited Europe in 1306, stated that the 'most Christian' Emperor of Ethiopia had the allegiance of seventy-four kings and 'innumerable princes', some of whom observed the laws of Mohamed, but submitted to the Emperor in other things.²

A slightly different account was given to a Dominican monk, Pietro Ranzano, by a young Italian, Pietro Rombulo, who had visited Ethiopia in 1407. He said that the land of Prester John

1. Marco Polo, pp. 347–8.

2. *Ethiopian Itineraries*, p. 214.

was made up of twelve kingdoms, not seventy-four, and that each kingdom was divided in turn into many principalities which assisted the Emperor in his wars with Egypt and the Arabs. A Frenchman, Bertrandon de la Brocquière, who met Rombulo in 1432 provided the additional information that the twelve great lords paid the Emperor tribute annually in slaves and gold, and that, as in Marco Polo's day, a century and more earlier, he was constantly at war with the Muslim kingdom of Adal.³

The Egyptian courtier Ibn Fadl Allah, who obtained much of the information for his *Masalik el Absar* (c. 1342-1349) from a Muslim shaikh from Zeila called Abd Allah, had meanwhile collected a certain amount of geographical material on the Islamic sultanates of Ethiopia, most of which at one time or another owed allegiance and paid tribute to the Emperor. They covered an area which, he said, was two months' march from north to south and even more from east to west. The greater part of this land, however, was desert, the inhabited area measuring only about 43 days' journey longitudinally by 40 days latitudinally. In all there were seven sultanates. The most powerful was Awfat (Ifat), which extended 15 days' march by 20, controlled the port of Zeila as well as the province of Adal (to the west of it) and sometimes received the assistance and support of the other sultanates. These comprised Dawaro, which was 5 days' march by 2; Arababni (?), 4 days by 4; Hadya, 8 days by 9; Sharkha (Sarka, or Enarea?), 3 by 5; Bali, 20 by 6; and Dara (east of the Blue Nile), 3 by 3.⁴ All these kingdoms, he explained, were 'weak and poor' because there was little cohesion among them and their agricultural produce was 'not abundant'. There was also considerable religious antipathy between Christians and Muslims. 'I heard from Shaikh Abd Allah at Zeila and other learned men of this country,' he adds, 'that if these seven kings maintained a united front and replaced their rivalry by a solid union, they would have the power to defend themselves and to resist; but, in addition to their weakness and the dispersion of their authority, they are jealous of each other. Some of them throw themselves into the arms of the King of Amhara and are under his authority; and in their abasement and poverty, they pay him annually a fixed tribute which consists of cloths imported from Egypt, the Yaman and Iraq.'⁵

3. *ibid.*, pp. 5-9. 4. Gaudefroy-Demombynes, pp. 1-19. 5. *ibid.*, p. 2.

With the dawn of the sixteenth century our knowledge of the political geography of the Horn of Africa assumes greater precision, as it is possible to draw both on the testimony of Ethiopian ecclesiastics in Europe and on that of foreign visitors to the Horn of Africa. The Venetian, Alessandro Zorzi, in interrogating Ethiopians in Italy was most anxious to ascertain the confines of the realm and questioned these and other informants closely on this matter. From various sources he learnt that in the north, Cia (Tokar?) and Suakin were both ruled by Muslim sultans who paid tribute to the Ethiopian ruler of Damasen (Hamasiën, in modern Eritrea). Brother Nicholas of Oliveto, a friar of San Michele at Murano near Venice, told him, with some exaggeration perhaps, that Prester John's domains stretched in the south almost to Mogadishu and comprised no fewer than one hundred and twenty kingdoms in which some sixty different languages were spoken; seventy-two kingdoms were said to be powerful, but the rest were of little account. The southernmost province was Diab(?), which included the region of Sanchra or Manna(?), and abounded in gold and 'every good thing'; its chief city was called Mogadis (Mogadishu), a port which was apparently much used by Portuguese traders.⁶

Brother Thomas of the order of St. Francis, who came from Ganget in Angot and gave his evidence in 1523, provided Zorzi with additional details of geographical interest. He explained that the province of Amara (Amhara) had its own dialect called Amara (Amharic) in the same way as the inhabitants of Tuscany spoke the Tuscan dialect.⁷ To the south of it, he said, lay the 'very great province' of Damot⁸ which was 'hot and torrid';⁹ and beyond it, bordering on the ocean (but according to Crawford somewhere to the south-west of Addis Ababa), lay the province of Voge(?) 'subject to queens and not kings'. They formerly fought against the Prester, but the princess then reigning lived in concord with him and paid him tribute.¹⁰

The foreign travellers of this time also endeavoured to define the area covered by the Ethiopian Empire. The Portuguese,

6. *Ethiopian Itineraries*, pp. 119, 126.

7. *ibid.*, p. 171.

8. According to Crawford Damot was at this time in the region of the Gibe river, one hundred miles to the west-south-west of Addis Ababa.

9. *ibid.*, p. 149.

10. *ibid.*, p. 151.

Duarte Barbosa, who completed a survey of the East in 1518, described it as 'a very great realm, very widespread and abounding in fair lands'.¹¹ His compatriot, Tomé Pires, who visited the Red Sea in 1512-15, also briefly discusses the political geography of the Horn of Africa. He uses the word 'Abyssinia' to refer to the Christian monarchy which had attracted so much attention in Europe, and 'Ethiopia' to cover a much wider area of East Africa, including a large part of the modern Sudan. Abyssinia, he asserts, was bounded on the Red Sea side by Arabia Felix, on the African side by deserts and 'part of Ethiopia', and on the side of Guardafui and Sofala by the sea sixty leagues¹² (or about two hundred miles) away.¹³ Affonso Albuquerque, who sailed in the East between 1503 and 1515, drew a similar picture, declaring that the empire of Prester John extended from Massawa, Suakin and Arkiko in the north towards Mogadishu and Sofala in the south, and was bordered in the west by the Nuba or Nubians and other people.¹⁴

The author of the *Carta das novas* (1521) was impressed like many of his co-religionists in Europe by what seemed to him the miracle of Ethiopia existing as an island of Christianity 'surrounded on every side by Moors'. The fact that what he termed the 'evil sect of Mohamet' had spread over so much of the world, almost as far as China, and that it controlled the whole of Arabia across the Red Sea 'without a particle of its proximity and wickedness' contaminating Prester John was, he declared, 'not without some very great divine mystery'. Elaborating this statement he reiterated that the Emperor was confronted on the coast by 'the King of Zeila and Berbera and other Moorish kings and lords', to the south between him and Mogadishu by other kings with whom he was at war, and to the west by a 'Moorish king', the lord of the country between him and Cairo, whom he was also fighting.¹⁵

Francisco Alvares, whose narrative is based, as we have seen, on a prolonged residence in the country (1520-1526) confirms most of Zorzi's statements as to the extent of the empire. He

11. Barbosa, pp. 37-8.

12. One Portuguese league equals 3.2 English miles. *Vide Some Records of Ethiopia*, p. xcvi n.

13. Pires, pp. 7-8.

14. Birch, Vol. IV, p. 38.

15. *The Discovery of Abyssinia*, p. 81.

observes that Prester John's coastal dominions stretched from the neighbourhood of Suakin,¹⁶ or more conservatively from Massawa, to the Muslim kingdom of Dankali the principal port of which was Belie (modern Beilul). This principality in turn reached as far as the kingdom of Adal, which was composed of twenty-four large 'lordships', exercised sovereignty over the ports of Zeila and Berbera, and continued along the coast even beyond Cape Guardafui; its king, he said, made constant war on the Christians, and sent the spoils of his battles as offerings and presents to the Muslim rulers of Mecca, Cairo and elsewhere, receiving in return arms and horses and 'other things to assist him in his wars'.¹⁷

Inland from the kingdom of Adal lay that of Adea (Hadya) which though 'of the Moors', was 'peaceful and subject to the Prester'; Alvares claims that it reached as far as Mogadishu on the Indian Ocean. He relates that during his visit the Emperor Lebna Dengel marched into this kingdom 'and withal did not desist from going very near Magadoxo (Mogadishu); and they said that it was a very fruitful kingdom, very wooded so much so that they could not travel without cutting trees and making roads. They also said there were plenty of provisions, and a great breeding of herds, and many and very large animals of different sorts. They say that there is in this Kingdom a great lake like a sea (possibly Lake Zwai) which cannot be seen across from side to side, and they say that there is in it an island, on which in a former time a Prester John had ordered a monastery to be built, and had put in it many friars, although it was a country of the Moors'. On this occasion, too, the Emperor 'ordered many monasteries and churches to be built, and left there many priests and friars, and many laymen to inhabit and dwell in that kingdom'. When the land was pacified the troops came back to where they had left the court.¹⁸

To the west of Adea in the south of the empire lay the important kingdoms of Oyja (Ogge or Voge – according to Pero Pais in the area of Mount Zequala)¹⁹ and Shoa, and, farther on, at 'the extremities of the kingdoms and lordships of the Prester', a number of pagan 'lordships or captaincies'. The 'very great country and kingdom' of Damot, though mainly pagan, was,

16. Alvarez, pp. 268, 343.

17. *ibid.*, pp. 345–6.

18. *ibid.*, pp. 330–1.

19. Beccari, Vol. XI, p. 128.

of the kingdom of Manicongo (a State which cannot be located with any accuracy).²¹

These geographical remarks by Alvares and his contemporaries provide an historical background for an examination of the survey of the Portuguese Jesuit, Manoel de Almeida, who visited Ethiopia some eighty years after de Castro.²² Almeida's record bears witness to the degree to which the Ethiopian Empire had shrunk since the time of the first Portuguese mission. Almost all the southern provinces had by then been lost to the Gallas with the result that the empire's centre of gravity had shifted substantially northwards. There too, however, ground had been lost, in this case to the Turks who had established themselves at Massawa in 1557.

Tigre was by now 'the best part' of what remained of the empire; it measured at its broadest, fifty to sixty leagues in width and covered ninety to one hundred leagues from north to south. It was bordered on the north-west by the province of Magaza, which was inhabited by Ballous²³ and Cafres,²⁴ on the south by Angot, which had been overrun by the Gallas, and to the east by the kingdom of Dankali which had become more or less independent, though the Moorish inhabitants of Doba (east of Sokota), remained subjects to the Emperor. The Dankali king, Telles tells us, was 'a very good Neighbour, and almost subject to the Emperor', a statement which is confirmed by Ludolphus who calls this ruler 'a firm Ally, but obliged to no sort of Tribute'.²⁵ The provinces of Salawa, to the south, and Tsalemt, across the Takaze river to the west, could, Almeida says, 'with good reason' be called part of Tigre.²⁶ Farther to the west the provinces of Walqayt, Sagade, Wagara, Semien and Abargale, though said to have been formerly part of Begemder were now separated from it, as were the districts of Enfras and Dara to the east of Lake Tana.

Still more to the west the province of Dambea (which included Dancaz and had Gorgora as its capital) lay along the north and west side of Lake Tana and covered ten or twelve leagues by

21. Kammerer, *Le Routier de Dom Joam de Castro*, p. 73.

22. cf. also Beccari, Vol. XI, pp. 130-3.

23. The Bellu or Balaw were once the inhabitants of the Agordat region. *Vide Some Records of Ethiopia*, p. 12.

24. This term was applied by the Portuguese to Pagan Africans.

25. Tellez, pp. 224-6; Ludolphus, p. 234.

26. Almeida, p. 16.

twenty-four. It was bordered by Wagara in the north, Begemder in the east, Gojam on the other side of Lake Tana in the south, and by the Agaos of Achafer and Tanqha(?) and some Cafres and Ballous in the west.

Gojam, on the banks of the Blue Nile, extended over some thirty-two leagues by fifty, but part of the north-western side, 'the best in the whole kingdom', was inhabited by Agaos, most of whom were seldom the Emperor's subjects. The Gongas to the south-west, still belonged to the realm, though the Cafres on either side of the Blue Nile and some Gongas on the far side were now independent. The Gafates,²⁷ who were 'mixed with the Gallas', were in control of Bizamo, which had formerly been part of the empire, but was now severed from it. Beyond the Blue Nile to the south of Gojam lay Shoa, Ganz and Damot, and towards the east, Amhara and Begemder. These provinces had all borne the brunt of the Galla advance.²⁸

Begemder, which had once been 'the biggest' of all the provinces, now stretched for only about forty leagues from east to west; it included the Lasta mountains in the east, as well as the Blue Nile districts of Dara and Daber in the south. It was divided in the east from Amhara by the Bashilo River, 'a great volume of water'.

Amhara, which measured about forty leagues from east to west, bordered on Begemder and Angot to the north, Ifat to the east, Gojam across the Blue Nile to the west, and Shoa and the province of Holeca (Walaqa) to the south. It was separated from these last two territories by the 'big' river Quessan(?) and had more hills, mountains, and ambas than the rest of the empire, being composed indeed of 'a chain of very high mountains'. Its hills and valleys were 'very fertile in all kinds of food, in honey and horned cattle'.

South-east of Amhara the Gallas were in occupation of 'the greater part of Shoa', though 'some villages of Abyssinians' still existed on a few ambas. The nearby province of Holeca, which lay between Gojam, Amhara and Shoa, had also been an integral part of the empire, but had become 'much infested' by the Gallas.²⁹

Farther to the south-west lay the isolated and hard-pressed

27. A Semitic tribe occupying the province of Gafat.

28. *ibid.*, pp. 16-18.

29. *ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

province of Enarea, which was cut off from the rest of the Prester John's domains by Gallas and Cafres, but nevertheless defended itself valiantly because its inhabitants were 'of great bravery and very intelligent'. Their *Xumo* (Shum), or governor, unlike most of the prefects of the realm, was not a stranger appointed by the Emperor, but 'the descendant of their former kings who inherited his position from his father as his ancestors had done when they bore the title of kings'. To the east of this province lay Gengiro, which was 'inhabited by heathens' who had 'never been subject to the Empire', and the land of the Gurages who were also 'heathens and Moors'. To the north-east of Enarea lay Bizamo which had also been 'swallowed up' by the Gallas and Cafres. Through all these provinces passed the road from Gojam to Enarea, the country of the Gurages and Bizamo. It had formerly been within the borders of the realm, but had since fallen to the Gallas. Beyond these lands there were 'various Cafre countries' which had 'never been subject to the Abyssinian Empire'.³⁰

The Ethiopian Emperor, Almeida concludes, now ruled and governed his domains without having any king under him, for the 'Moorish' King of Dankali and the 'heathen' King of Gengiro, 'very petty kings', were not strictly speaking his subjects, though they had 'due respect' for their 'great and mighty neighbour' and gave him 'some recognition'.³¹

The provinces of the realm were also described by Gregory who wrote to Ludolphus that they were often known as *Nagarits*, or drums, as it was customary for a drum to be beaten and trumpets to be blown in honour of their rulers or prefects. Tigre, 'the stretch of land behind Suakin,' he states, was ruled by a Dejazmach under whom there were forty-four prefects, who, when travelling, were preceded by the blowing of horns and trumpets. Inland from that province lay first the country of Semien, then Dambea, at that time the residence of the court, then Begemder, and finally Amhara, the former royal abode and birthplace of kings and high office bearers, and the place of origin of scholars, writers, judges and administrators. Comparing the shape of this royal province to that of a man Gregory added: 'The head of Amhara is near Geshen and Angot to the east; one of its feet, the left, stands on the land of Walaka in the west and

30. *ibid.*, p. 19.

31. *ibid.*, p. 72.

its right foot would like to tread on Gojam, but it prevented by the River Abai (Blue Nile), the two provinces lying on either bank. One of its sides towards the north touches Begemder which is only separated from it by a large river called Bashilo, while its other side touches Shoa in the south, being divided from it by a river called Wantsit' (Wanchit).³²

Ludolphus, who, as we have said, used Gregory's information to supplement or correct the records of the Jesuits, agreed with Almeida that Tigre was 'the best and most fertile' province left to the Emperor, but confirmed that it was exceeded 'for nobleness' by Amhara. This last-mentioned territory, he said, was 'the most noble Kingdom of all Ethiopia' by reason of the two 'inaccessible Fortified Rocks', Amba Geshen and Ambacel, where the Emperor's sons had formerly been confined, and was accounted 'the Native Country of the late and present kings and of all the Nobility'. Begemder, he stated, was also 'a large and fertile kingdom, watered with many Rivers'; Gregory had been reminded of it when visiting Germany. Enarea, which had been subdued and converted by Sartsa Dengel (1563-1597) also enjoyed a fertile soil and its inhabitants had been 'much applauded' by Gregory for their probity and integrity. The province of the Bahrnagash, the northernmost part of Tigre, was divided into seven prefectures; one of them, Hamasien, consisted of three towns subject to the Emperor which nevertheless had the right to choose their own magistrates; they were governed by their own laws 'like a Petty Common-wealth' and often gave protection to exiles and fugitives.³³

In the century and a half which followed the expulsion of the Jesuits the external frontiers of the realm remained surprisingly stable, though internally there were substantial changes to record. The establishment of Gondar as the capital of the Emperor Fasiladas in 1636 emphasised the paramountcy of that part of the country, though Bruce writing of the half decade from 1768 to 1773 noted that the city was then politically overshadowed by Tigre, the province of Ras Mikael Schul.

Bruce's geographical remarks are frequently interesting. He begins by pointing out that the Christian highlands of Ethiopia could be divided into two broad linguistic divisions; Tigrinya-speaking Tigre, between the Red Sea and the Takaze, and

32. Flemming, pp. 99, 105.

33. Ludolphus, pp. 10-19.

Amharic-speaking Amhara between that river and the Blue Nile which bordered on Galla lands.³⁴ Tigre, he considered, was then the more important of the two from the point of view of riches, power and dignity. Traditionally it had been bounded by the territory of the Bahrnagash, that is to say by the River Mareb, on the north-east, and by the Takaze on the west, and measured some two hundred miles from north to south by about one hundred and twenty from east to west. In the years before Bruce's visit, however, it had expanded westwards across the Takaze, and having annexed Enderta and Antalow had 'swallowed up' a great part of the province of the Bahrnagash. Less preoccupied than the other provinces with the advance of the Gallas its proximity to the sea also gave it a great advantage. 'What in a special manner makes the riches of Tigre,' he explained, 'is that it lies nearest the market, which is Arabia . . . all the merchandize destined to cross the Red Sea must pass through this province, so that the governor has the choice of all commodities wherewith to make his market. The strongest male, the most beautiful female slaves, the purest gold, the largest teeth of ivory, all must pass through his hand. Firearms, moreover, which for many years have decided who is the most powerful in Abyssinia, all these come from Arabia, and not one can be purchased without (the ruler of Tigre) knowing to whom it goes, and after having had the first refusal of it.'³⁵

Inland from Tigre lay the provinces of Shire, Semien and Angot. The first, a province twenty-five miles broad, was usually considered part of Tigre but had often been autonomous. Semien, which was separated from Shire by the Takaze, was a highland region made up of a chain of rugged mountains, one of which, the so-called Jews' Rock, was largely inhabited by the Falashas or Jews. Angot, except for a few villages was almost entirely overrun by the Gallas, who, as we have seen, had already established themselves there in Almeida's time.³⁶

South-west of Tigre lay the wealthy province of Begemder, which together with the mountains of Lasta, covered one hundred and eighty miles in length by sixty in breadth. It was 'well stocked with cattle of every kind' and with 'all sorts of

34. Bruce, Vol. III, p. 248.

35. *ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 251-2; cf. Guidi, *Annales Regum Iyasu II et Iyoas*, pp. 156, 217, 228-30.

36. Bruce, Vol. III, pp. 152-3.

wild fowl and game', while its mountains were 'full of iron mines'. It was, moreover, 'the strength of Abyssinia in horsemen'. The neighbouring inhabitants of Lasta, who paid one thousand ounces of gold to the king every year, were also renowned in battle. They were usually reckoned as part of Begemder when not actually in rebellion. Because of Begemder's importance and its vicinity to the capital, only noblemen of rank, family and character, able to maintain a large number of troops, were trusted with its government. Its south-eastern end, called Nefas Mawcha, which was cut into 'prodigious gullies' had proved a 'great barrier' to the encroachments of the Gallas who had made many attempts to settle there but all in vain. Fogara, which measured about thirty-five miles by twelve, and the two 'small governments' of Dreedda and Karoota, had once formed part of Begemder but had since become independent.³⁷

The province of Amhara, which lay between the rivers Bashilo and Gesheh (Yasum?), stretched for one hundred and twenty miles from east to west and was over forty miles in breadth. It was 'a very mountainous country, full of nobility', its inhabitants being 'reckoned the handsomest in Abyssinia, as well as the bravest'.³⁸

Between the Gesheh and the Samba (Walaqa?) lay the low and unwholesome but fertile province of Walaqa, and to the south of it, Upper Shoa, the land which had once been the retreat of the only surviving son of the house of Solomon during the period of Zagwe usurpation. Shoa had moreover 'the honour of being the native country of Takla Haymanot, restorer of the line of Solomon, the founder of the monastery and order of monks of Debra Libanos and the power and wealth of the Abuna and the clergy in general of Abyssinia'. Bruce was confident that this kingdom, though surrounded by Gallas, was now in a position to dispossess them, having the 'bravest and best' equipped horsemen in the land. Safe and independent as its ruler had become, he was still the most loyal prince in Ethiopia, and 'upon any signal distress happening to the King (Emperor) never failed to succour him powerfully with gold and troops, far beyond the quota formerly due from his province'.³⁹

Gojam, which stretched for eighty miles by forty, was 'full of

37. *ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 252-3; Jones, p. 384.

38. Bruce, Vol. III, pp. 254-5.

39. *ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 255-6.

great herds of cattle, the largest in the high parts of Abyssinia'. Bruce considered it 'very populous', though its inhabitants were said to make poor soldiers and were 'much inclined to turbulence in religious matters', being of what he called the 'Low Church of Abyssinia'.⁴⁰

To the south-east of Gojam, within the curve of the Blue Nile, lay Damot, which extended about forty miles by slightly more than twenty, and was bounded by the Tamcha on the east, the Gult (Shita?) on the west, the Blue Nile on the south, and the high mountains of Amedamit on the north.

Beyond these last-mentioned mountains to the west lay the provinces of the Agaos, which were bounded by Burye and Wanbarma and the country of the Gongas on the west, by Damot and Gafat on the south, and by Dingleber on the north. The countries of Goutto, Arussi and Wayna Dega⁴¹ had formerly been inhabited by the Agaos; but partly through war with the Gallas across the Blue Nile and partly by their own constant rebellions the region called Maitsha, flat country on both sides of the Nile, had become quite uninhabited, though the Gallas had occupied the low country at the foot of the Aformasha mountains. Maitsha was too wet and marshy to produce much corn and depended almost entirely on the false banana, known as *musa ensete*; the mountains above it, which were inhabited by the Agaos (who occupied the country from Aformasha to Quaquera at the heads of the rivers Kelti and Branti), however, constituted 'the richest province still in Abyssinia', notwithstanding the 'multitude of devastations' it had suffered.⁴²

The low-lying province of Dambea stretched from Dingleber along Lake Tana, below the mountains bounding Guefgue and Kuara. Like Wagara, a small high province on the north, it was 'all sown with wheat', and was one of 'the granaries of Abyssinia'. This general area was called *Atte-Kolla* (*Atse-quolla*),⁴³ its produce being largely assigned for the supply of the king's household'.⁴⁴

South-west of Dambea lay the 'very mountainous' province of Kuara which was inhabited by 'Pagan blacks', or Shanqellas,

40. *ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 256.

41. Wayna Daga is here used as a place name.

42. *ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 258.

43. An area of the lowlands (*qolla*) providing teff for the Emperor (*atse*).

44. *ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 259.

called Gongas and Gubas. Though 'very unwholesome', it abounded in gold, which came, however, not from within the province but from the neighbouring Guba, Nuba and Shanqella tribes.

In the low regions of Kuara near to Sennar there was also a settlement of 'Pagan blacks' called Ganjar, who were mainly horsemen and lived by hunting and plundering the Arabs of Atbara and Fazuclo. Bruce believed that they had formerly been the slaves of the coastal shepherds, but had deserted at the time of the Arab invasion soon after the advent of Mohamed. They were controlled by the Governor of Kuara, 'one of the greatest officers of state' who, being the king's lieutenant-general, had 'absolute power in his province' and carried the *nagarit* and *sandaq*, kettle drum and staff of office, the symbols of such power.⁴⁵

Nara, Ras el Fil, Chelga and Cherkin, all on the western frontier, formed 'a barren strip of very hot, unwholesome country, full of thick woods, and fit only for hunting'. Its inhabitants, 'fugitives from all nations', were chiefly Muslims, and were 'very bold and expert horsemen', who used no other weapons than the broad sword with which they attacked both elephant and rhinoceros. They were governed by a stranger to their province who was appointed by the Emperor; this official was frequently a Muslim, his deputy-governor being invariably one. Ethiopian troops were stationed in the area 'to defend the friendly Arabs and Shepherds', who owed allegiance to the empire, from their neighbours, 'the Arabs of Sennar', as well as to secure 'a constant supply of horses for the King's troops'.⁴⁶

Though Bruce did not travel into the Galla country to the south he learned about it at second hand, chiefly from its many sons who by his day were in the Emperor's service.⁴⁷ They told him that the women of this warlike people took the lead in agriculture, sowing, ploughing and reaping, while the menfolk looked after the cattle which were also used to tread the corn.⁴⁸

Farther to the south again, and largely isolated by Galla conquests, lay the rich province of Enarea, which was 'abundantly

45. *ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 259-60.

46. *ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 260-1.

47. *ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 216.

48. *ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 221.

supplied' with 'cattle, grain and all sorts of provisions', as well as gold from a neighbouring 'Negro country'. The people of Enarea, he concluded, were 'exceedingly brave' and had only been conquered and driven from the lowlands by 'multitudes' of invaders.⁴⁹

49. *ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 312-4.

Chapter 3

Government, Administration and Justice

TRADITIONALLY the Emperors of Ethiopia enjoyed immense power and prestige. The Ethiopians in this respect lived in complete accord with their legal code, the *Fetha Nagast*, or 'Law of Kings', which proclaimed the divine right of kings on a scriptural basis.¹ Translated into Ethiopic from an Arabic text written in the thirteenth century by a Copt called Ibn al Assal this document recalled the words of Moses:

'Thou shalt in any wise set him king over thee whom the Lord thy God shall choose; one from among thy brethren shalt thou set king over thee: thou mayest not set a stranger over thee, which is not thy brother.

'And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book, out of that which is before the priests the Levites' (Deuteronomy XVII, 15, 18).

The king, the *Fetha Nagast* declared, should receive respect and obedience as laid down in the scriptures, for Christ had commanded: 'Render . . . unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's' (Matthew XXII, 21), while St. Paul, in his epistle to the Romans had written:

'Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.

'Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God; and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.

'For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? Do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same.

'For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.

1. Guidi, *Il 'Fetha Nagast'*, pp. 467-5. Vide also Guidi, *Annales Regum Iyasu II et Iyoas*, p. 184.

'Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.

'For, for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing.

'Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour' (Romans XIII, 1-7).

Such ideas were reflected in the reality of Ethiopian government and administration. As early as the middle of the fourteenth century the Egyptian, Ibn Fadl Allah, recorded that even the rulers of the Muslim sultanates of Ethiopia, though hereditary, obtained their authority 'only upon being invested by the King of Amhara'. When one of them died his male relatives hastened to that sovereign and 'did everything they could to win his favour, as it was he who chose to whom he would confer power'.²

A century later the chronicle of Zara Yaqob (Constantine I, 1434-1468) provides considerable information on the government of the realm in what appears to have been a formative period. It states that this ruler ordered amulets to be worn inscribed with the words, 'Belonging to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,' and on either arm, 'I deny the Devil in the name of Christ who is God,' and 'I deny Dasek³ the accursed. I am the servant of Mary, the mother of the Creator of the world.' An army of spies was also constituted to search out secret idolaters. This organization was at first operated by a grand inquisitor, the *Aqabe Saat* (Keeper of the Hour), who abused his powers and was replaced by the Emperor's daughters Madhen Zamada and Berhan Zamada. The provincial administration was also entrusted to royal princesses: Tigre to Del Shamera, Angot to Bahr Mangasha, Gedem to Sofya, Ifat to Amata Giyorgis, Shoa to Rom Ganayala, Damot to Madhan Zamada, Begemder to Abala Maryam, Gan and Gojam to Atnaf Sagadu, and Amhara to Amata Masih. This arrangement seems to have been unsatisfactory, for the Emperor himself later took over the government of the whole empire and appointed a class of high officers, called *Adakshat*, each governor having a special title in his province: A *Raq Masare*, or officer of the royal household, in the provinces of Shoa, Gojam, Begemder, Tigre, Qeda(?), Angot, Gan, Gedem

2. Gaudefroy-Demombynes, pp. 1-26.

3. An Ethiopian evil spirit.

and Ifat, an *Eraq Masare*, a similar official, in Damot, an *Azaj*, or commander, in Fatajar, an *Awrari*, or general, in Dawaro, a *Garad*, or provincial governor, in Hadya, and a *Tsahafe lam*, or superintendent of the royal cattle, in Amhara. The Emperor, who also reorganized the system of revenue and took in hand the administration of the clergy, is said to have left nothing outside his authority. 'Everyone', the chronicler of his reign declares, 'trembled before the power of the king.'⁴

Alvares throws considerable light on the powers of the sovereign several decades later, on the eve of Grañ's invasion. He tells us, for example, that the Bahrnagash was appointed by the Emperor and that this appointment lasted no longer than the monarch pleased. 'For in our time, which was a stay of six years,' Alvares writes, 'there were four Barnagais, that is to say, when we arrived Dori was Barnagais; he died, and at his death the crown came to Bulla, his son, a youth of ten to twelve years of age, by order of the Prester John. When they crowned him he was at once summoned to the court, and while he was at the court Prester John took away his sovereignty and gave it to a great nobleman. This man held it two years, and they took from him his lordship and made him the greatest lord of the Court, which is *Betudete* (*Bitwaded*)⁵ and the lordship was given to another lord.'⁶ Observing that the governor of Tigre had then but recently been appointed, he says of the provincial rulers: 'The Prester John deposes them and appoints them whenever he pleases, with or without cause; and on this account there is no ill humour here and if there is any it is secret, because in this period that we remained in the country I saw great lords turned out of their lordships, and others put in them, and I saw them together, and they appeared to be good friends. (God knows their hearts.) And in this country, whatever happens to them, of good fortune or of loss, they say of all of it, that God does it.'⁷

Alvares also describes the legal system in which the Emperor constituted the final court of appeal. He states that a judge could be seen outside the house of the Bahrnagash ceaselessly hearing cases and administering justice. If the case was important, after hearing it he reported to his master who passed judgment, but if

4. Perruchon, *Les Chroniques de Zara Yaeqob et de Baeda Maryam*, pp. 4-16, 75-6, 94-101.

5. This word is often said to mean the Beloved.

6. Alvarez, pp. 268-9.

7. *ibid.*, p. 93.

it was a less important matter, or if the parties themselves wished it, he gave the decision himself.⁸ All cases, whether tried by the governor or judge, were witnessed by an 'honourable man', known as a *Malkanya*, or notary of the sovereign, who would report to the Emperor in cases of appeal. Judges and *Mal-kanyas*, Alvares states, were to be found in all courts of law throughout the land.⁹

Appeal cases were decided by the Emperor though not normally heard by him in person. Alvares says that such cases were heard in a long tent of justice situated near the Emperor's own tent and that as a sign of reverence everyone was expected to dismount on passing it. Inside the tent there were thirteen plain chairs of iron and leather, one very tall one at the end of the tent, the others six on one side and six on the other. These chairs were 'only for ceremony' as the judges sat on the ground. 'The plaintiff', Alvares explains, 'brings his action and says as much as he pleases without anyone speaking and the accused answers and says as much as he pleases, without anyone hindering him. When he has finished, the plaintiff brings his reply (if he wishes it), and the accused also with his reply if he chooses, without anyone disturbing him. When they have finished their arguments by themselves or by their representatives, there is a man standing, who is like a porter, and having finished relating it all, he then says which of the parties spoke best his opinion, and which of them has justice on his side. Then one of those who are sitting like commissioners, the nearest the end, does like the porter, that is, he relates all that the parties had said, and then says which he thinks has justice. And in this manner follow all those who are sitting. They rise to their feet when they speak, and then it comes to the turn of the Chief Justice, who has been attentive to what has been said by the others and to their opinion; and so he gives his sentence if there is no proof required. If there is to be proof, they give a delay according to the distance, and all verbally, without writing anything.' Finally, when all was heard, the judges proceeded to the Emperor's tent, speaking to him through the curtains, and returned with his decision. 'Sometimes', Alvares concludes, 'they spend a whole day with these goings and comings.'¹⁰

8. *ibid.*, pp. 63-4.

9. *ibid.*, p. 64.

10. *ibid.*, pp. 333-5.

At about this time Zorzi was informed by the Franciscan Brother Thomas that normally when the King gave audience he remained behind a curtain so that no one could see him, his subjects speaking to him through an intermediary or interpreter with their eyes lowered; similarly when he rode abroad they all looked to the ground, and woe befell any who dared to look him in the face. Foreigners, however, were not obliged to follow this custom and conversed with him face to face. Visitors from other parts of the country who came to court were obliged to pay their respects to him before returning to their own land. Failure to observe this rule carried heavy penalties.¹¹ These statements are almost all confirmed by Alvares.¹²

A hundred years later Almeida, who had just been expelled from the country as a Jesuit and was naturally somewhat unfavourably disposed towards its institutions, devoted much attention to a critical analysis of the government of the realm, which suggests that the powers of the monarch were now in actual practice somewhat less than Alvares had suggested. The Emperor, he explained, 'confiscates and grants all the lands as and to whom he chooses, though there are some, chiefly in Tigre, the lordship of which he does not take away from the families and descendants of their first holders'. Such exceptions included the Bahrnagash, or ruler of the sea province, the *Shums* or governors of Serae, Shire and Tembien, and the *Kantiba*¹³ of Dambea. These offices were seldom given to persons who were not descended from former rulers of the area though they were frequently transferred from one member of the family to another, the Emperor reallocating them as he wished 'every two years, sometimes every year, and even every six months'.¹⁴

Returning to this point Almeida in another context observes: 'It is so usual for the Emperor to exchange, alter and take away the lands each man holds every two or three years, sometimes every year and even many times in the course of the year, that it causes no surprise. Often one man ploughs the soil, another sows it, and another reaps. Hence it arises that there is no one who takes care of the land he enjoys; there is not even anyone to plant

11. *Ethiopian Itineraries*, pp. 167-9.

12. Alvares, pp. 270, 338-9.

13. The honorary title of a ruler; then used in Hamasien, Dambea and other places.

14. Almeida, p. 72.

a tree because he knows that he who plants it very rarely gathers the fruit. For the King, however, it is useful that they should be so dependent upon him. So it comes about that, some from fear that the lands he has given them may be taken away, others in the hope of getting those they have not, all serve him in peace and war and each one gives him presents in accordance with his ability, for usually he who gives less gets less.’¹⁵

‘The worst thing’, the discontented priest elsewhere remarks, ‘is that these and other governorships of all his kingdoms and provinces seem to be sold rather than given. No one receives them except by giving for them an amount of gold which is more or less the income and profit the aspirant and applicant hopes to get from them. As there are always many applicants those who give most for them usually receive them. They give much more than they can honestly derive from them, and so as not to be at a loss, they fleece the people, disposing of the lesser offices and the governorships of particular places and territories to those who promise and give most in return for them. So it is all merely an auction. Since these governors are the lords and judges and hold in their hands absolute control over the lives and property of the whole population, generally speaking, they are all plunderers rather than governors.

‘It is true that, while their government of the kingdom or province lasts, it is possible to appeal to the tribunals of the court and to the Emperor, but there are few who dare appeal. It is as good as to declare themselves enemies of the Governor or Viceroy *acto regente*, and they are afraid that he may look for some pretended and very plausible pretext to destroy them. When his governorship is taken away from him, or his time completed, is the time for poor persons to make their complaints about him and for them to be heard on the subject of his injustices to them. All those whose terms of office are coming to an end, either by intercessors or bribes, which are always worth more and can do more than anything else, usually procure from the Emperor an order for the issue of a proclamation to the effect that no one can sue them for anything that they or their servants have done. With this exemption and plenary indulgence all the robberies and acts of violence they have committed against property and against women, married and betrothed, are consigned to oblivion

15. *ibid.*, p. 89.

as though they had never been committed. This is the account to which they are called. It is so well established that they do not consider it sinful and this abuse has still not been removed today. Anyone who is shocked by it is told that this has always been the way their country has been governed and that there would be widespread rebellions if any other were introduced.¹⁶

Ludolphus, confirming that the sovereign had very extensive powers, affirms that 'the power of the Abyssinian kings is absolute, as well in ecclesiastical as in civil affairs'.¹⁷ Pointing out however, that these powers in practice fell short of their theoretical maximum, he tersely comments: 'So great and so absolute a Power, and so uncontrollable a Dominion over their Subjects, one would think should render the Kings of Ethiopia vastly Potent: and so no doubt it would, if other things were correspondent.'¹⁸

Observing that only a few provincial governors were able to claim their positions by right of inheritance he asserts that the Emperors, like most 'Eastern Kings', did not 'deem it a decent thing to command Illustrious Families' as they did not believe that 'servitude can be expected from those that are accustom'd to Command themselves. Moreover, they presume that Hereditary Dignity is an obstruction to Virtue; that Men are more certainly made, than born great; and that they will prove more faithful, whom they have rais'd from the Dust, than such as claim their Fortunes from their Ancestors'.¹⁹

Almeida, discussing the various functionaries of state, explains: 'Under the Emperor there was formerly a dignitary whom they used to call *Beteudet* (*Bitwaded*), which is the equivalent to favourite or confidant, by antonomasia. There were two who had this dignity, one of the left hand and the other of the right. Almost the entire government rested with these two men for the King did not discuss anything with anyone, or give audience or even allow himself to be seen, except by very few people. Those two *Beteudetes* had everything in their hands. It is now some years since the Emperors have been less muffled and have allowed themselves to be seen by and conversed with everybody. They then saw that that office was an undesirable one for the two *Betuedetes* were the Kings and the King was one in name only.

16. *ibid.*, pp. 72-3.

17. Ludolphus, p. 198.

18. *ibid.*, p. 202.

19. *ibid.*, pp. 234-5.

So they abolished it and created another in its place which they called Ras, which means head, for he who has that position is, under the King, head of all the great men in the empire. He is the chief counsellor and minister both in peace and war, though he applies himself more to the latter and is generally generalissimo in the more important wars.

‘Under this is another post they call *Bellatinoche goita* (*Blattengeta*), which means master of the servants,²⁰ because he is like a *Mordomo Mor* (head of the royal household) and has the governorship and authority over all the Viceroys, captains, *Xumos* (*Shums*) or governors, and over the *Azages*²¹ and *Ombaras*,²² who are the *desembargadors* and *ouvidors* (Portuguese commissioners and judges) of the empire. In the palace and court there is another whom they call *Tecacan* (*teqagen*)²³ *Bellatinoche goita*, meaning master of the lower servants, or lesser *Mordomo Mor*, who has control of the ordinary pages, equerries and stable boys, who are very insignificant people and of low degree. As for the Emperor’s house servants, I say nothing of their being Kings’ sons, as someone else has pretended they are, for there are none in the empire, but they are not even the sons of ordinary respectable men, but only captive slaves of different races, some Agaus, others Gongas, other Cafres or Ballous. Yet he often makes these men *Xumos* and raises them to the greatest offices of the court and this is not thought reprehensible. The Emperor says that he finds that these men, whom he has in this way created and made from dust and earth, are faithful to him, although not all of them are, but they seem to be more so than others.

‘Under the great *Bellatinoche goita* are all the other Viceroys and governors of Kingdoms and provinces and the ordinary captains of the Emperor’s camp, who are those of the vanguard, the rearguard, the right hand and the left; so they call what we call the right and left wings. There are also the tribunals and magistrates, the chief of whom is the chief of the *Azages* (judges), who seem to correspond to our *desembargadors* though they are not, as among us, divided into those of the palace, of criminal and of civil cases. There are only some of the right hand and

20. Literally ‘master of the pages’.

21. Some judges are called *azazi* in Ethiopic and *azaj* in Amharic.

22. Appellate judges, the Amharic for chair being *wambar*.

23. Literally ‘minor’.



Above: A battle scene. Note the use of spears and shields and the warriors' costumes made of skins. (From an early eighteenth century MS., British Museum Orient 603.)

Below: A Portuguese arquebusier such as those who came to Ethiopia, as seen through West African eyes. A bronze figure from Benin (circa 1524). (British Museum collection.)





Above: Battle scenes. Note that the enemy is turbaned and in one case has a matchlock; the infidel is always depicted in profile with one eye. (From an early eighteenth century MS., British Museum Orient 533.)

Below: Another warlike scene. Note the trumpeters and the array of spears. (From an early eighteenth century MS., British Museum Orient 603.)



some of the left. Under them are the *Ombares*, which means chairs, because the plaintiff and defendant stand while these men sit in their chairs. To them, if they belong to the court, comes the appeal in any civil or criminal case in the whole empire, and in the first instance, cases from the court or camp, which is the same thing in this empire. From them the appeal lies to the *Azages* and from them to the King. If the *Ombares* do not belong to the court then an appeal lies from them to those who do.

'No suit', Almeida concludes, 'is drawn up in writing. They are all begun and finished verbally, and no witnesses are heard except the plaintiff's, so that he is usually successful, since he produces the witnesses he wants. It is true that the defendant can cast suspicion on them, and he does on those he can, but as the case is decided on them only, it gives a great advantage to those who buy them without fear of God for what they ask; there are many to be had, for any purpose, and very cheaply.

'The judges order a convicted murderer to be handed over to the relatives, children or wife of the dead man, a custom that like many others, comes down to them from the Jews. They, if they wish, spare his life in return for goods that he gives them; if not they kill him at their pleasure and by the death they think fit. If it is not established who the murderer was, the inhabitants and neighbours of the place where death occurred are dragged in, and a large quantity of goods is taken from them all, the just man paying for the guilty. Yet it is certain that fear of this punishment prevents many deaths.'²⁴

The practice of collective punishment according to another Jesuit, Manoel Barradas, was not universal though very general. It was applied not only in cases of murder but also when a horse or mule belonging to one of the nobles was lost while on a journey. This may have led to abuse, for Barradas says it was rumoured that unscrupulous owners sometimes maliciously allowed their animals to get lost or pretended that they could not be found in order to obtain compensation. Deceitful persons, he comments, could in this manner easily attain their object, but could be assured of losing their souls. Asmara, we are told, was one of the areas exempt from all types of collective punishment,

24. Almeida, pp. 73-6. *Vide* also Beccari, Vol. II, pp. 167-8; Bruce, Vol. II, p. 695.

a privilege which had been granted to it apparently in honour of its old church of the Holy Virgin.²⁵

Notwithstanding their immense powers the Emperors, at least in the Gondar period, appear often to have sought the advice of their courtiers before making important decisions of state.²⁵ The *Chronicle of Iyasu I* (1682–1706) attempts to provide a biblical basis for this practice, citing the Psalms: 'Advice is good for those who follow it' (Ethiopian version CX, 10).²⁶ During the Gondar period at least, the courtiers normally spoke more or less in ascending order of importance though this sometimes led to confusion when the line of precedence was not clearly defined. In 1690, for example, a quarrel broke out in the Emperor's presence which he resolved by ordering the learned men and judges to ascertain what was the tradition of the land. In due course they reported that it was customary for courtiers to speak in the following order of rank: First *Shalaqas*, or officers commanding one thousand men, in charge of *Dal Chawa* troops, i.e. royal guards; then *Shalaqas* in command of soldiers stationed in the town. Both types of officer spoke in order of importance, and were followed by the other officers of state in this order:

The *Taj Azaj*, a minor commander in charge of the *taj* or mead.

The *Liqamakwas*, the king's double or impersonator, who was often the master of the horse.

The *Balambaras*, or colonel, literally the commander of an *amba* or mountain fortress.

The *Bajerond*, or superintendent, of the lion house.

The *Bajerond* of the throne room.

The *Nagadras* in charge of the throne and royal cushion.

The *Fitawrari*, or commander of the advance guard.

The *Grazmach*, or commander of the left wing.

The *Kanyazmach*, or commander of the right wing.

The *Teqaqen Blattengeta*, or master of the minor servants.

The *Zandaraba Azaj*, or chief of the eunuchs.

The *Tarasemba Azaj*, an officer of the royal household.

Four *Azaj*, of the left and right.

Two *Tsahafe Taezaz*, or royal scribes.

25. Beccari, Vol. IV, p. 186.

26. Guidi, *Annales Iohannis I, Iyasu I et Bakaffa*, p. 70.

The *Wust* (inner) *Azaj* (or *Sarag Masare*), the master of ceremonies.

The *Basha*,²⁷ chief of the riflemen because he held the title of *Dajazmach* (literally keeper of the gate).

These officers were followed by provincial governors: first the *Tsahafe Lam*, or superintendent of the royal cattle, of Damot, because this province was the most important in supplying garrison troops, then the *Nagash*, or governor, of Gojam, because he was a chief of chiefs, then the *Tsahafe Lam* of Amhara because he was 'Patriarch' (of Tadbaba Mariam), then the *Azmach*, or governor, of Begemder, because he was the 'chief of the clergy' and archpriest of Lalibela, then the *Aggafari*, or chamberlain, of Semien, because the Emperor Fasiladas had once held this position, then the *Tigre Makonnen*, or prince of Tigre, because he was deputy *Nebura Ed*, or chief priest of Aksum, and lastly, the *Nebura Ed* himself. Finally there spoke the *Aqabe Saat*, literally the guardian of the hour, a priest or monk who always accompanied the sovereign, the *Talalaq Blattengeta*, or head chamberlain, and, last of all, the *Ras* (*Bitwaded*), the principal man of state. It was customary, the courtiers concluded, for the sovereign to wait till all had spoken before making his decision which was final and irrevocable.²⁸

Iyasu seems to have been completely satisfied with this report for he ruled that the above order of precedence should be rigidly observed,²⁹ as it was indeed also by his son Bakaffa (1721-1730).³⁰

The Emperor's role in government is also discussed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by Poncet and Bruce, both of whom are mainly concerned with conditions in the Gondar area. Poncet relates that he was present in the great hall of the palace when Iyasu I received petitions from his subjects. 'Those who had favours to beg came in and advanced up to the foot of the throne where one of the ministers took their petitions and read them with a loud voice. Sometimes the Emperor took the pains to read them himself, and made answer out of hand.'³¹

27. The term *Basha* (*Pasha*) was used because, as we shall see, Arabs had often been employed to fire cannon and other firearms. *Vide* Bruce, Vol. II, p. 614.

28. Guidi, *op. cit.*, pp. 151-2.

29. *ibid.*, pp. 152-3.

30. *ibid.*, pp. 313-14.

31. Poncet, pp. 118-19.

Iyasu, he added, had 'an extraordinary love for justice' which he administered with 'great exactness'.³²

Bruce, who visited the country during the decline of the monarchy, states that it was still customary for suitors and litigants to assemble outside the palace 'from early in the morning to night', crying for justice 'as loud as possible in a distressed and complaining tone'.³³ In questions of policy, he confirmed, the Emperor traditionally consulted a Council of State before coming to a decision. He sat in 'a kind of box' with a lattice window slightly above the council table so as not to be seen by his counsellors who, he confirms, spoke in ascending order of rank, 'the youngest or lowest officer always speaking first'. Judgment on a particular issue would thus, he said, be passed by the *Shalaqas*, or colonels of the household troops, the courtiers in charge of the Emperor's drink, the *Bajerond* (or treasurer), who was the keeper of the lions' house, the head of the banqueting house, the *Liqa Makwas*, who always went before the sovereign in procession, and various persons of the ranks of *Balambaras*, *Fitawrari*, *Grazmach*, and *Kagnazmach*; afterwards came the *Blattengeta*, or Chamberlain, the *Hatze Azaj*, or royal secretary, the *Azajes*, or generals, and then the governors of Damot, Semien, Amhara and Tigre in that order. The last mentioned – Ras Mikael – being the most important governor had a golden cup placed before him. Then followed the *Acab Saat* (*aqabe saat*), who was the chief ecclesiastical officer of the household, then the master of the household, and lastly the *Betwaded* or *Ras*. It was only after hearing these opinions that the Emperor gave his verdict, which was sent down to the table from the royal balcony by the *Qal-Hatze*, or 'voice of the King', and was considered final.³⁴ Abram, the Ethiopian at Calcutta, informed Sir William Jones that as far as he knew the Council of State consisted at this time of about forty ministers to whom 'almost all the executive part of government' was committed.³⁵

The ownership of land in Gondar and Begemder depended on the will of the sovereign who allocated it to his subjects in return for their loyalty and service in peace and war. Though in

32. *ibid.*, p. 131.

33. Bruce, Vol. III, p. 273.

34. *ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 265–8, 271–2, 275, 279; Vol. IV, pp. 73, 76.

35. Jones, p. 384.

Poncet's time constantly engaged in fighting the Emperor was held in the highest esteem by his people who gave him their complete obedience. Discussing the reason for this fact which Almeida had already noted, Poncet observes: 'the great power of the Emperor arises from hence: that he is absolute master of all the wealth of his subjects. He gives and he takes away, as he thinks fit. When the head of a family happens to die, he seizes upon all his real estate of which he leaves two-thirds to the children as heirs. He disposes of the other third to some favourite, who by that means becomes his feudatory and is obliged to serve him in time of war at his own expenses and to furnish him with soldiers in proportion to the estate he gives. Whence it comes that this prince, who has almost an indefinite number of feudalities, can in a short time and at small expense raise powerful armies.'³⁶

'All the land', Bruce confirms, 'is the King's; he gives it to whom he pleases during pleasure, and resumes it when it is his will. As soon as he dies the whole land in the kingdom (that of the Abuna excepted) is at the disposal of the crown; and not only so, but, by the death of the present owner, his possessions, however long enjoyed, revert to the King, and do not fall to the eldest son. It is by proclamation that the possession and property is reconveyed to the heir, who thereby becomes absolute master of the land for his own life or the pleasure of the King, under obligation of military and other services; and that exception on the part of the Abuna, is not in respect to the sanctity of his person, or charge, but because it is founded upon treaty, and is become part of the constitution.'³⁷

These statements in the first edition of Bruce's *Travels* should be read in conjunction with the qualifying remarks incorporated in later editions from material found in his notebooks. 'Every man in Habbesh', we are told, 'is at the disposal of his sovereign, with regard to person and property; but the crown makes no violent use of its power in that respect.' Many families in fact enjoyed their lands from father to son without being deprived of them by the sovereign, though the governors often robbed the inhabitants in their provinces. Lands were nevertheless seldom granted by the crown *in perpetuum*, though it was tacitly pre-

36. Poncet, p. 126.

37. Bruce, Vol. II, p. 266. *Vide* also Vol. III, p. 280.

sumed that this would be the case unless the recipient was somehow stripped of them by 'injustice or rapacity'.³⁸

Poncet and Bruce, it should be emphasized, were both writing with special reference to the situation in and around Gondar. The sovereign's control over land distribution was always much greater in the vicinity of the capital than in outlying provinces, and was correspondingly less in regions, such as Tigre, where the ownership of land was largely vested not in the individual but the clan.

With the decline of the monarchy the powers of the sovereign were usurped by chiefs who assumed the role of prime ministers and even, as in the case of Ras Mikael Sehul, acted as king makers. One of them, the Galla Ras Gugsa Guangul (1799-1825), was destined in 1800 to claim very extensive control over all property in land.³⁹ Of this period the royal chronicles note that appointments and dismissals of governors and men of state took place most frequently, 'but the names of the officials we do not know, as for each office they appointed three or four each day'.⁴⁰

38. *ibid.*, 3rd ed., Vol. III, pp. 16-17. *Vide* also Vol. VII, p. 85.

39. Blundell, p. 439.

40. Gabre Sellassie, Vol. I, pp. 201 and n, 202 n.

Chapter 4

The Seclusion of the Royal Family

AFTER THE massacre of the members of the royal family on Debra Damo by Gudit in the tenth(?) century, the practice of detaining members of the royal line is said to have been abandoned for almost half a millennium until the reign of Baeda Maryam (1468–1478) who ordered Amba Geshen¹ to be used for this purpose.²

Succession seems to have been traditionally based on the principle of primogeniture modified by the choice of the Emperor of the most suitable heir, a choice which in practice was not infrequently modified in turn by decision of the Empress Regent, the Abuna and the principal men of state. Alvares who questioned many Ethiopians on this matter relates that some said 'by the death of the Prester, the eldest born inherited; others say that he who appeared to the Prester the most apt, and of most judgment, inherited; others say that he inherited who had most adherents'. The Abuna told him that he and the Queen Mother had made Lebna Dengel sovereign 'because they had all the great men in their hands. Thus it appears to me that, beyond primogeniture, adherence enters into the question'.³

The existence of the great flat-topped mountain, where all the sons of the Prester were confined 'like banished men' to prevent possible attempts on their part to usurp the throne, was described by Alvares in some detail. He was informed that the custom of imprisoning the royal princes had been instituted in bygone times when it was revealed to Emperor Abraham or David (i.e. Baeda Maryam) 'that all his sons should be shut up in a mountain, and that none should remain except the first-born, the heir,⁴ and that this should be done for ever to all the

1. North-west of Dessie, in Amhara province. For a modern writer's account of his travels to the old royal mountains of Geshen, Wehni and Debra Damo, *vide* Pakenham, pp. 155–84 *et passim*.

2. Bruce, 1st ed., Vol. II, pp. 7, 80–1.

3. Alvarez, p. 143.

4. The heir was in fact sometimes also detained.

sons of the Prester of the country, and all his successors : because if this was not so done there would be great difficulty in the country, on account of its greatness, and they would rise up and seize parts of it, and would not obey the heir, and would kill him'.⁵ 'This mountain', Alvares continues, 'is generally guarded by great guards, and great captains; and a quarter of the people who usually live at the court are of the guards of this mountain and their captains. These captains and guards . . . lodge apart by themselves, and no one approaches them, nor do they go near others, so that no one may have an opportunity of learning the secrets of the mountain. And when they approach the door of the Prester, and he has to receive a message or speak to them, they make all the people go away, and all other affairs cease whilst they are speaking of this.'⁶

The prisoners were all killed a generation later,⁷ in 1540, by Grañ's forces with the result that the mountain prison had fallen somewhat into disuse by Almeida's time. He relates in a description of the place, which is largely confirmed by Pero Pais,⁸ that the practice of sending members of the royal household to Amba Geshen had been abandoned after the reign of the Emperor Naod (1494-1508), and that the princes who were still there ceased to be guarded with any assiduity during the reign of Galawdewos (1540-1559). The latter monarch, was 'careless about having them watched and made light of it' with the result that 'most of them came down and went up as they liked'.⁹

Amba Geshen, Almeida informs us, 'is nearly round, though on top it appears to have the shape of a cross. Going along the edge of the rock it is probably little more than a league round on top, but one would have to walk for half a day to go round it on foot at the base. Its height is such that a stone thrown from a sling by a strong arm would reach from the bottom to the top with great difficulty. It is precipitous rock all round and in places it turns outward in such a way that it is impossible to get in. There is only one way in (though once it was entered in another place . . .) called Macaraquer. The ascent begins with a wide path up to a platform made by the mountain. From there to the

5. Alvarez, p. 140. *Vide also Ethiopian Itineraries*, p. 167.

6. Alvarez, p. 144.

7. Bruce, Vol. II, pp. 169-70.

8. *Vide* Beckingham, *Amba Geshen and Asirgarh*, pp. 182-8.

9. Almeida, pp. 100-1.

top of the path is so narrow and steep that it can only be climbed with great labour. Though the cows and oxen of this country climb and jump like goats, they do not go up or down that path unless they have been tied up and dragged with thongs, by which they are lifted bodily. At the top of this ascent is a house where the guards live, built of stone and mud and thatched, as they are there. In the middle of the plain is a big pool, natural, not artificial, where they wash their clothes. Not far off is another little one from which they drink. It is spring water, but there is so little of it that it does not overflow or make a stream. There are no fish in either of them'.¹⁰

'The Emperors' sons and their descendants', Almeida concludes, 'used to live all over the Amba in their cottages of stone and mud, or wood, all of them thatched. Some Emperors promised them a third of the revenues of the empire, but they never gave them anything except some lands that lay nearby. To cultivate and manage these lands properly on their behalf, collect the revenues and send them what they need for their clothing, certain great men live near Guizen (Geshen) who are like their factors and who watch and guide them. Formerly any messages whatsoever that came from the princes and the letters that came and those the princes themselves wrote, did not pass through without being examined by those men.'¹¹

The detention of the male members of the royal family was resumed by Fasiladas (1632-1667) who chose for the purpose the mountain of Wehni which remained the royal prison throughout the Gondarine period.¹²

Baratti, writing at this time when the empire was 'much weakened', criticized the practice of detaining the heir to the throne, arguing that such procedure was incompatible with the true education of a future emperor. If such a person was shut up 'within the narrow limits of a little territory', he said, his ambition became confined, and when at last allowed to assume the throne he was 'content with what he then enjoyed' and regarded his domains, whatever their extent, as 'a superfluity' being larger than the 'narrow mountain or small Territory' to which he had hitherto been restricted. Being accustomed to 'a

10. *ibid.*, pp. 97-8.

11. *ibid.*, pp. 99-100.

12. Bruce, Vol. II, pp. 416, 421.

Pedantic life', moreover, he would not know how 'to handle the helm of State' or 'act supreme in the business of the Empire'. It was for this reason, the Italian concludes, that 'our Countryman Machiavel wisely advises, let the Prince that is to succeed his Father be nursed up in the Camp, and in the midst of business among men of courage and resolution that he may take impressions suitable to the employment he is to have in the world, for were a Prince to judge of a proposition of Divinity or to compose a piece of Latine or Greek, I would then shut in the wandering thoughts of his youth, and not suffer him to see the world abroad; but seeing he is to command men, rather than scholars, and to compare those Affairs upon which depend his subjects quiet and happiness, I think it is wisdom to train him up accordingly, and let him see the face of soldiers as well as of Pedants, a Gun and a Sword as well as Books, that he may not only be a Master, but a King'.¹³

The subsequent decline of the monarchy in the eighteenth century was a period of inherent chaos. Thus Bruce states that if at the death of the king his sons were old enough to govern and for one reason or another had not yet been sent as prisoners to Wehni, the eldest or eldest but one could generally take possession of the throne by the strength of his father's friends; if, however, no heirs were at liberty the choice was always according to the will of the chief minister who claimed to speak for the people. The minister's interest and inclination being to govern, it followed that he usually chose an infant whom he directed, ruling the kingdom during the minority which not infrequently lasted throughout the reign.¹⁴

The financial standing of the prisoners varied greatly from period to period. It seems to have been particularly good during the reign of Iyasu I (1682-1706), who on visiting Wehni discovered that its inhabitants were suffering deprivations and increased their revenues. Bruce says that in his day the prisoners were said to receive every year two hundred and fifty *oqueas*, or ounces, of gold and seven hundred and thirty pieces of cloth.¹⁵

13. Baratti, pp. 41-3.

14. Bruce, Vol. III, pp. 262-3. *Vide* also pp. 307-8; Vol. II, pp. 114, 124.

15. Bruce, Vol. II, p. 430; 3rd ed., Vol. VII, p. 76.

Chapter 5

The Absence of a Fixed Capital; and the Organization of the Court

THE ETHIOPIAN Empire, as has already been suggested, was for long stretches of time without a fixed capital though sovereigns often went to Aksum to be crowned. Alvares indicates however that the imperial camp was often as large as a town and was laid out according to a regular plan. Whenever possible a large level plain was selected and on its highest point were pitched five or six thousand tents.¹ The camp invariably moved according to a prescribed order, though the ruler did not always accompany it, often preferring to travel in lesser state and stop at the monasteries by the way. Most of the emperor's time was in fact spent in marching from one part of the country to another.

Alvares declares that the enormous number of people who accompanied the court along the road from one encampment to another was 'scarcely credible' and constituted a formidable army. The distance between each camp was certainly three or four leagues, but, he adds, 'the people are so close together that they look like a procession of Corpus Domini in a great city . . . the tenth part of them may be well-dressed people, and the nine parts common people, both men and women, young people, and poor, some of them clothed in skins, others in poor stuffs, and all these common people carry with them their property which consists of pots for making wine and porringers for drinking. If they move short distances these poor people carry with them their poor dwellings, made and thatched as they had them; and if they go farther they carry the wood of them, which are some poles. The rich bring very good tents. I do not speak of the great lords and gentlemen, because each of these moves a city or a good town of tents, and loads, and muleteers, a matter without number or reckoning. I do not know what to say of those on

1. From the Ramusio text, as translated by C. F. Beckingham and G. W. B. Huntingford. The present author is indebted to these translators for making available to him material which will appear in the second Hakluyt edition of Alvares which was not published at the time of writing.

foot (there are so many) . . . The Court cannot move with less than fifty thousand mules, and from that upwards, the number may reach a hundred thousand. There are very few horses, and the led mules are twice or thrice as many as the others; these are not reckoned in the number of the mules'.²

Alvares states that when the Emperor travelled with his court he was often preceded by four lions bound with strong chains. He was accompanied by no fewer than thirteen churches, which were carried by the priests with 'much reverence', and he did not move without at least a hundred jars of mead and as many baskets of bread. Alvares adds that the Prester rarely followed a straight direction, nor was it generally known where he was going to halt until his great white tent was pitched. Sometimes, moreover, he did not go to this tent, but slept at monasteries or other places off the route. At such times the court – and the lions – followed a more direct road. On the approach of either the Emperor or one of the above-mentioned churches every man or woman on the road stepped aside and those on mule dismounted.³

The Florentine trader, Andrea Corsali, reporting to Duke Lorenzo dei Medici from the coast in 1517, also refers to the Emperor's practice of marching from place to place with 'innumerable people', some on foot and some on horseback. This army or retinue, he said, was so large that Prester John could not remain in any one place for more than four months nor return to the same camp in less than ten years because of the resultant shortage of food.⁴

Almeida writing a century later corroborates the account of Alvares in most of its details. The Emperor's camp, he declares, was the 'royal city and capital of the empire', and deserved the name of city because of the multitude of people and the good order that was observed in choosing its site, particularly in the rainy season. For the last ten years the Emperor had been established at a place called Dancaz (twelve miles south-east of Gondar) though before that over a period of thirteen or fourteen years he had lived in five or six other places in each of which he had stayed two, three or four times. These frequent changes

2. Alvarez, pp. 217–18.

3. *ibid.*, pp. 219, 233.

4. *Historiale description*, p. 25.

of capital were due, he said, to the low cost of house building, as well as to the need to move about to fight first one enemy and then another, and to find firewood which was often insufficient to allow of prolonged residence in any one place. The sites chosen were always selected for their abundance of wood, but as a result of the absence of any scientific method in cutting down the forests they were usually denuded within a few years, the camp being then obliged to move in quest of further firewood.⁵

Describing his first impression of the Emperor's camp, Almeida remarks: 'Almost in the centre . . . on the bulge of a not very high hill, was the Emperor's city or camp. It may have had as many as eight or nine thousand hearths, but as the houses are all of wood, or stone and mud, and thatched, and as they are nearly all round, it seemed more like a mountain of ricks than a city.' He added, however, that some four or five years previously some stonemasons brought from India by Pero Pais had built a palace of stone and lime which was 'a wonder in that country and something that had never been seen nor yet imagined'; it 'would have value and be reckoned a handsome building anywhere'. It stood inside two very wide and long enclosures in a situation dominating all the rest and was therefore visible a long way off. It had halls and rooms on the ground floor and upper floor, very well proportioned, and terraces from which one could see not only the camp and the whole of Dancaz, but even very distant places in all directions.⁶

The Emperor, the lords and ladies, as well as the captains and many of the soldiers, had their own tents which were pitched in a very orderly way. 'The Emperor's tents,' he explains, 'four or five very large tents, are placed in the centre. A handsome open space is left and then on the left hand and on the right, before and behind, follow tents for two churches that he takes with him, those of the Queen and great lords, who all have their allotted places, then those of the captains and soldiers in accordance with the command to which they belong, those from the vanguard in front, and behind those from the rearguard, some of those from the wings on the right and others on the left. When the whole camp has been disposed in the way I describe it occupies a very large meadow and is certainly a splendid sight, especially at night with the great number of fires that are lit.'⁷

5. Almeida, pp. 82-3.

6. *ibid.*, p. 188.

7. *ibid.*, p. 79.

Ludolphus, reviewing the history of the emperor's movements, declared that until the invasion of the Gallas the emperors' camps had normally been pitched in the 'fertile and most plentiful country' of Shoa, but had since been pushed northwards by the invader; in 1607 at the beginning of the reign of Susneyos, the royal headquarters had been at Coga, whence it was transferred to Gorgora in 1612, and later to Dancaz and Guendra which last-mentioned place was therefore called 'the Metropolis of Ethiopia' though in a few years' time it would perhaps move again, nothing of the former capital remaining to tell the tale. 'The Kings of Abyssinia', he declared, 'live continually in Tents,' either because they were 'not accustomed to Houses' or because their 'frequent Wars and tedious Marches' would not admit of long rest. 'The King's Pavilion' he added, was 'a very large one, of white colour placed in the middle of the Camp'; it was surrounded by 'a large space of Ground' which was 'left void' both to obviate the danger of fire and to accommodate the horses of the nobility and of those who brought provisions. Around this field, the grandees, friends and relatives of the emperor and other courtiers pitched their tents.

The arrangement of the camp, Ludolphus emphasized, was very methodical. It was the camp-master's duty to search out convenient land well supplied with wood, grass and water. This done 'he fixes a Pole in the Earth with the Royal Banner at the Topp; upon the sight whereof, they that measure for the Nobility, set up their Masters Lodgings. After them the Common Souldiery, and others that follow the Camp either for Victuals or else upon business. And thus in a few hours' time the whole Camp appears in the same Order as it was before. For every one knowes his place and his proportion, there being never any alteration of the Order, but the same Streets and Lanes, the same distance of Tents, so that were it not for the variation of the Prospect, other Mountains, other Rivers, and another Face of the Country, you would think your self still in the same place. When the Cryer has once proclaim'd the day of Removal, they presently know how to pack up their Baggage, and in what order to march without any more ado; who are to march in the Front, who in the Rear, who on the Right, who on the Left; so that all things are done without Noise or Tumult'.⁸

8. Ludolphus, pp. 214-15.

It would be a mistake, however, to assume that the royal abode was ceaselessly on the move, for several rulers attempted to establish fixed capitals. One of the first was Zara Yaqob (1434–1468) who built a notable palace at Debra Berhan which had a roof ten cubits high and was surrounded by walls fifteen or twenty cubits high. He once spent no less than twelve years there.⁹ Zorzi's informants and Ahmad Grañ's chronicler, Arab-Faqih, as we have seen, also refer to several royal towns or capitals which were evidently long established and based on more or less permanent settlement.¹⁰ Zorzi was informed by an Italian monk who had visited the country in 1470 that Prester John's capital lay in the centre of the realm at Barara in a province called Abbasia. Crawford identifies Barara with modern Borora, a small mountain south-east of Addis Ababa, not far from the present agricultural centre and holiday resort of Bishoftu officially known as Debra Zeit. This identification, however, fails to accord with Fra Mauro's map of 1460 which places Barara east of Mount Ambanegst (modern Managasha?), west of the River Doco (Dukam), and north-west of 'Xiula over Ziquala' (Mount Zequala), represented as a mountain 'on which there is a great lake and an abbey of holy monks'.¹¹ According to Fra Mauro, Barara would thus be due east of Managasha, or (if his map is reorientated so as to place Lake 'Çuua', or Zwai, as it should be, to the south) due south of the mountain, perhaps on the north-western slopes of Mount Wuchacha. Arab-Faqih, on the other hand, suggests that the capital was at a place called Badeqe which must have been somewhere in the same area.¹²

After the end of Grañ's wars around 1550 the Emperor Galawdewos (1540–1559) established a fixed capital in one of the villages in Wadj, thereby, as his chronicler states, abandoning the custom of earlier rulers who travelled from camp to camp 'until their last resting place'.¹³ Sartsa Dengel (1563–1597) later established a fixed capital in Wagara in 1589 and is said by his chronicler to have remained there until the end of his reign.¹⁴

9 Perruchon, *Les Chroniques de Zara Yaeqob et de Baeda Maryam*, pp. 23–6, 37–40, 78.

10. *Ethiopian Itineraries*, pp. 111, 121, 133, 161; Arab-Faqih, pp. 83, 101, 114, 131, 214, 221.

11. *Ethiopian Itineraries*, pp. 85–6, 111.

12. Arab-Faqih, pp. 83, 101, 114, 131, 214, 221.

13. Conzelman, pp. 149–50.

14. Conti Rossini, *Historia Regis Sarsa Dengel*, p. 156.

His reign was also important for the construction at Guzara, east of Lake Tana, of a castle which may well be considered as a precursor of the famous Gondar buildings, the first of which was built at least a generation later.¹⁵

Gregory, writing to his friend Ludolphus in the middle of the seventeenth century reported that though the tents and barracks of the sovereign were 'made of cotton material' so as to be 'readily portable', they were 'rolled up and put aside' when the monarch was at his residence; on such occasions the courtiers lived not in tents, but in houses of wood and stone called *saqala*.^{16 17} The Ethiopians, Bruce confirms, invariably used tents on campaign so as to enjoy the greatest possible freedom of movement, but during the rains they repaired to more permanent dwellings as no house of canvas had yet been invented which could withstand the inclemency of the weather between June and September.¹⁸

15. Monte della Corte, *I Castelli di Gondar*, pp. 105-11. Vide also Lejean, p. 6.

16. *Saqala*, originally a tent, but also applied to a rectangular stone house.

17. Flemming, p. 104.

18. Bruce, 1st ed., Vol. II, p. 494.



St. Mark. Note inkstand and reed pen. (From an early fourteenth century MS. from Dabra Maryam Church in Lake Tana.



A later writing scene. (From an early eighteenth century MS., British Museum Orient 533.)

Chapter 6

Population and Towns

THE SEMI-NOMADIC court life was a great obstacle to the growth of large towns. There is in fact little support for Marco Polo's assertion that there were 'many cities and towns in Ethiopia';¹ on the contrary as early as 1482 the Italian Francesco Suriano noticed that in most parts of Ethiopia there were no stone houses or other permanent buildings, though each king on coming to the throne built a church in which he was to be buried. He was satisfied, however, that the population of the country as a whole was 'large'.²

The only significant urban centre at this time was Aksum which Alvares describes as 'a very good town' with 'a very noble church'. Within the church enclosure there were 'handsome habitations of terraced buildings', all of which spouted out water through 'strong figures of lions and dogs of stone'. Outside the enclosure there was 'a large assemblage of very good houses, such as there are not in the whole of Ethiopia, and very good wells of wrought masonry, and also in most of the houses the before-mentioned ancient figures of lions and dogs and birds, all well made in stone'. There were also 'many wells and tanks of good masonry'.³

The Portuguese priest gives the impression that many parts of the country were populous. Thus he says that between Debaroa and Barra, three and a half to four leagues – nine to twelve miles – away more than fifty towns are to be seen: I say large towns and very good ones, on all the heights.⁴ Angot, too, was 'very thickly populated with large towns', while the lower slopes of the mountains near Lalibela were 'studded' with an 'infinite number' – perhaps a hundred of them, and all very big.⁵

Zorzi's informants suggest that there was also a dense population in the settled parts of Shoa. The Franciscan Brother Thomas,

1. Marco Polo, p. 251.

2. *Ethiopian Itineraries*, p. 45.

3. Alvarez, pp. 78, 81–2, 406. *Vide* also Bent, p. 192 *et passim*.

4. *ibid.*, p. 44.

5. *ibid.*, pp. 139, 132.

for example, says that a few miles to the north-east of Barara, which he called the 'great city' of the Prester, the home of the Patriarch and the site of a 'great church', lay Ufat where there was a large mountain with no fewer than three thousand monks; eight miles to the north lay Eson(?), another 'great city' with 'a university of many scholars', and, five miles farther on, Zancar (Chancora?), the court of the King.⁶

The 'towns' of this period, however, were little more than villages. Debaroa for instance, although the capital of the Bahrnagash and one of the more important trading centres in Tigre, contained, in the view of Alvares, scarcely more than three hundred houses;⁷ elsewhere he remarks that the 'town' and trading centre of Manadeley (according to Crawford Corbeta in Tigre) had only one thousand inhabitants.⁸ 'In all the country' he explains, 'there is no town which exceeds one thousand six hundred inhabitants, and of these there are few, and there are no walled towns or castles, but villages without number'. Most houses, he adds, were round, and all were of one storey, covered with thatch, often with courtyards around them.⁹

Almeida and Pero Pais corroborate this picture four generations later, observing that apart from the Emperor's camp there was no settlement that deserved the name of city or even town, but only villages large or small. Aksum is described by Pero Pais as a place between one hundred and fifty and two hundred houses; Almeida, on the other hand, said it had only 'about a hundred inhabitants' and that the village of Zalot (five miles south south-east of Asmara) had little more than three hundred men armed with *zargunchos* (lances) and shields.¹⁰ Many areas, however, were so densely populated that the whole countryside seemed to be inhabited. Other parts were less populous and some were completely deserted. Villages in general were without a wall or fence, though those in Amhara and other provinces bordering on Galla lands were often surrounded by a wall of stones without mortar.¹¹

The houses of the rich, he adds, were usually of stone and

6. *Ethiopian Itineraries*, p. 149.

7. Alvarez, p. 44.

8. *ibid.*, p. 103.

9. *ibid.*, p. 403.

10. Almeida, pp. 90, 182; Beccari, Vol. II, pp. 193-4, 202.

11. Almeida, pp. 82-3.

mud, while the rest of the population made their walls of stakes set very closely and thatched. In the north as far inland as Debaroa flat roofs were to be seen, but these were normally 'so low that there are few you do not touch with your head'. Elsewhere most houses were round though those of the Emperor and of a few other notables were usually rectangular and were called *sacala* (*saqala*) which had come to mean the palace of the king or a grandee. Round houses, if large were called *Behetanguc* (*betanegus*), literally 'house of the king'.

The lords and nobles had the cross-beams of their houses arranged close together to serve as a ceiling to which they attached braiding of different colours; the finished appearance looked 'very well', the house being 'pleasant and reasonably commodious'. Each lord had six, eight or more of them, in 'very capacious' enclosure walls which were made of stones without mortar up to six or seven spans high surmounted by thorn fences very closely set.

The absence of lime in Ethiopia was for centuries an obstacle to the erection of better buildings, but Almeida relates that, seven years before the time he wrote, an 'intelligent person from India' had discovered a 'fine, light and as it were worm-eaten stone' similar to one which he had seen in the Gujerat region of India being used for the manufacture of lime. The Emperor Susneyos (1607-1632) and his courtiers had valued this discovery highly and had as a result undertaken the construction of very many beautiful churches of stone.¹²

Ludolphus, who was at pains to explain the poor quality of Ethiopian building in historical terms, argued that a retrogression had taken place since the golden age of Aksum. 'After the kings of Habessinia left Axuma,' he affirms, 'they never had any constant Mansion, nor Palaces, but contented themselves to live in tents'.¹³ Formerly they had practised the art of architecture as was evident from 'the Ruines' of Aksum and the 'Magnificent Temples' cut out of the 'Live Stone Rocks' of Lalibela; on moving to Amhara, he said, the Emperors 'chose to abide in Tents and Pavillions', considering them more suited to their 'long and frequent marches'; the invasions first of Ahmad Grañ and later of the Gallas had, moreover, obliged them often to take to the 'Caverns and Recesses of Inaccessible Mountains' which they

12. *ibid.*, pp. 83-4.

13. Ludolphus, p. 210.

found 'more safe and convenient and better shelter than sumptuous Palaces'.¹⁴

Apart from Aksum there were therefore 'no Cities in Habessinia, and but few Towns'. Ludolphus himself had heard only of Debaroa, the seat of the viceroys of Tigre, Fremona, the former residence of the Jesuits, Gubay, the residence of the Queen in Dambea, Nanina in Gojam, which had been inhabited for a time by the Portuguese, and – perhaps the only town of the group – Macana Celace (Makana Sellassie) in Amhara. 'To reckon up more,' he added, 'is not worth while: neither is it certain whether those already mention'd are standing or no.'

'The Habessines', he elsewhere asserts, 'wonder to hear of so many great Cities among Us. For they do not believe the Country can afford Timber and Food sufficient for so many Houses, nor the Cattel that must support such Numbers of People remaining so long in one place. For they pitch their Tents up and down the country and cut down and make havock of what they have need of without consideration of the damage or regard to the future. For they neither Navigate their own Rivers, neither do they know what belongs to Carriage or Stores; living without any care of to Morrow.'¹⁵

'It is sufficiently known,' he concludes, 'that Cities are not inhabited by any of the Habessine People, neither do they permit continuous buildings among them. They place their Villages not as we do, building our Houses close one to another; but everyone encompasses to himself a space of ground peculiar to his Habitation whether to prevent the accident of Fire or whether it be their ignorance of the Art of Building. They neither use Cement nor Tiles, the whole composure of their Fabricks being all of rude and coarse Materials without the least appearance of Elegancy or Ornament.'¹⁶

Though Ethiopia remained overwhelmingly a country of small villages in the time of Poncet and Bruce, both travellers indicate that there were many rural areas with relatively dense populations. Thus the Frenchman observed on entering Ethiopia at Serke on the Sudanese frontier that the mountains were 'so peopled that one would take it for one continuous town'.¹⁷ In Wagara, too, the mountains had 'so great a number of houses

14. *ibid.*, p. 391.

15. *ibid.*, p. 209.

16. *ibid.*, pp. 338, 391.

17. Poncet, p. 111.

that they seemed to be one continue'd town. . . . Markets are to be found everywhere. . . . The country swarms with people'.¹⁸ The Scots laird confirms this impression, declaring almost a century later that Wagara was 'inconceivably populous'.¹⁹

Moreover, a number of other towns beside Gondar now caught the attention of foreign visitors. Emfras, a trading centre to the east of Lake Tana, one day's distance from the capital, was, Poncet declares, a famous market for slaves and civet, and a place where there was no division at all between the followers of Christ and Mohamed: the Muslims, he said, had 'public exercise of their religion' and their houses were 'mixed with those of the Christians'.²⁰ Bruce later put the number of houses in the town at about three hundred,²¹ which, on the basis of the estimate of Eduard Rüppell, the early nineteenth-century German naturalist – 6.5 persons per dwelling – would suggest a population of almost two thousand. Debaroa, the capital of Tigre, was, according to Poncet, 'about two leagues in circuit' and 'as it were the bureau and general magazine of the commodities of the Indies'. 'All the houses', he adds, 'are built with square stones and the roofs are flat'. In contrast to Emfras, however, adherents of the two faiths lived apart, the Christians in the upper town and the Muslims in the lower.²² The same was true at Digma which Bruce refers to as Dixan.²³ Ibaba, the capital of Maitsha, was in his view 'one of the largest towns in Abyssinia, little inferior to Gondar in size or riches'. It was obviously a place of importance for though he makes no estimate of its population or number of houses, he says it possessed a 'house or small castle' belonging to the King, and every day held a market which was governed by an officer whose employment was 'worth six hundred ounces of gold' and was generally conferred upon the principal person of Maitsha.²⁴ Aksum, the most important city and trading centre of Tigre had, in Bruce's opinion, no more than six hundred houses,²⁵ but Shire was somewhat larger.²⁶ Adowa was only half as populous as Aksum with some three hundred houses, though it occupied 'a much larger space than would be thought necessary to stand on as each house had an enclosure round it with

18. *ibid.*, p. 144.

19. Bruce, Vol. III, p. 191.

20. Poncet, pp. 136–7.

21. Bruce, Vol. III, p. 386.

22. Poncet, pp. 146–7.

23. Bruce, Vol. III, p. 86.

24. *ibid.*, Vol. IV, pp. 24–5.

25. *ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 132.

26. *ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 152.

hedges and trees'.²⁷ Hadawi, at that time the seat of the Bahrna-gash, had only eighty houses,²⁸ but Sanacho, a frontier village on the trade route to the Sudan, consisted of some three hundred huts or houses, all built of cane.²⁹ Mortar, Bruce emphasized, was used only in Gondar, and even there its quality was 'very bad'.³⁰

27. *ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 119.

28. *ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 95.

29. *ibid.*, Vol. IV, p. 316.

30. *ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 123

Chapter 7

The Establishment of Gondar

THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY, as we have already suggested, saw a great transformation in Ethiopia. The roving capital was replaced by a fixed and permanent centre of administration at Gondar where the Emperor Fasiladas (1632-1667) first settled in 1636,¹ three years after the expulsion of the Portuguese Jesuits.

The emergence of this great city may perhaps be attributed in part to the Ethiopian renaissance which had followed the defeat of the Jesuits, in part to the greater stability of government, and in part, as we shall see, to the discovery of mortar and the earlier building innovations of the Portuguese which probably spurred the Ethiopians to new architectural achievements as the defeat of Ahmad Grañ had done almost a century earlier, in the reign of Galawdewos. It is quite incorrect to describe the castles of the city as Portuguese, as many writers have done.²

A notable event was the building, soon after the expulsion of the Portuguese, of the famous castle of Fasiladas which still bears his name. The largest and grandest of the sturdy old castles to be built in the next hundred and fifty years it withstood the earthquake of 1704, when the tower called Jan Takal fell in, killing many people,³ and it weathered the subsequent ravages of war. According to the Yamani ambassador, Hasan bin Ahmad el Haimi, who saw it in 1648, perhaps a decade after its construction this 'noble structure' was built for the Emperor by an Indian architect and could be 'counted among the most wonderful of buildings'. The rest of the city, however, was still made up almost entirely of *tukuls*, or huts, which the ambassador described as 'nests of grass', adding, however, that there were more important houses of mud in the immediate vicinity.⁴ Bruce, who arrived a

1. Perruchon, *Règne de Fasiladas*, p. 86; Basset, *Études*, p. 287.

2. For a discussion on the matter *vide* Hodgkin, p. 177; Pankhurst, *Ethiopia, a Cultural History*, pp. 366-98.

3. Guidi, *Annales Iohannis I, Iyasu I et Bakaffa*, p. 241.

4. Peiser, pp. 38-9.



The Imperial quarter of Gondar.

From A. A. Monte della Corte, *I Castelli di Gondar*.

Buildings:

1. Castle of Fasiladas.
2. Bath of Fasiladas.
3. Castle of Iyasu I.
4. Small castle of Fasiladas.
5. Library of Tsadik Yohannes.
6. Chancellery of Tsadik Yohannes.
- I. Imperial Gate.
- II. Gate of the Judges.
- III. Gate of Funeral Commemorations.
- IV. Gate of the Chamberlain Tukure.

7. Menagerie.
8. House of the Lions.
9. House of Song of Dawit III.
10. Castle of Bakaffa.
11. Small palace of Empress Mentuab.
12. Turkish bath.

Gates:

- V. Enigma Gate or Gate of the Spinners.
- VI. Gate of the Queen's attendants.
- VII. Gate of the *imbilta*, of Flute Players.
- VIII. Gate of the Private Chamber.

13. House of Nuptials.
14. Church of Attami Qedus Mikael.
15. House of the Chief of Cavalry.
16. Ruins of the church of Ginjabet Mariam.
17. Castle of Ras Mikael Sehul.

- IX. Gate of the Ras.
- X. Gate of the Pigeons.
- XI. Gate of the Ladies in Waiting.
- XII. Gate of the Ginjabet Mariam Church.

century or so later, states that the castle was the work of masons from India, and Ethiopians who had been instructed in architecture by the Portuguese before their expulsion. Because the Ethiopians had very few firearms no embrasures for cannon were made in the surrounding wall, though the Jesuits at their establishment at Fremona had shown the use of such apertures.⁵

Numerous other castles, churches and other buildings were erected in the neighbourhood by subsequent monarchs: Yohannes I, Iyasu I, Dawit III and Iyasu II.⁶ The castle of Fasiladas was itself added to and repaired early in the reign of Iyasu I (1682–1706). His chronicle states that the building was decorated with ivory, gold and precious stones and was finished in 1685 by Walda Giyorgis, evidently an Ethiopian architect; it was said to have been ‘more beautiful than the house of Solomon’.⁷ According to local tradition the timber was brought from the region of Dabaz several days’ mule journey away.

Notwithstanding the growth of the capital, the emperors of this time were obliged, like their predecessors, to spend much of their time on campaign. The chronicle of Fasiladas reveals that during his long reign which lasted until 1667 there were only five years when he did not leave Gondar.⁸ Poncet draws a similar picture of the reign of Iyasu I: ‘As soon as the rains are ceased’, he writes, ‘he is used to take the field’ against the Gallas and Shanqellas. The Emperor was generally victorious; the Frenchman explains that he had defeated his enemies in several battles which had struck such a terror into those people that ‘as soon as the army of Aethiopia appears in the field they retire to the mountains which are almost inaccessible, where they sell their lives dear’.⁹

With its dense population living in fairly closely packed houses which were mainly thatched, the city of Gondar faced many of the problems of urban life and, according to the chronicles, suffered serious damage from fire on a number of occasions. A conflagration, which started in the house of a prostitute, destroyed all the houses of the *gra bet*, or left quarter, in April

5. Bruce, Vol. III, pp. 380–1, 126.

6. *Guida dell’Africa Orientale Italiana*, pp. 350–62; Pankhurst, pp. 366–98.

7. Guidi, *Annales Iohannis I, Iyasu I et Bakaffa*, p. 89.

8. Perruchon, *Règne de Fasiladas*, pp. 86, 88–9, 91.

9. Poncet, pp. 128–9.

1696.¹⁰ Four years later, in the same month, most of the town including at least two royal palaces and a church were consumed by fire,¹¹ while the church of St. Mikael was burnt down with other parts of the city in May 1726.¹² Bruce, describing the troubled situation in 1734-5, says that 'some part of the town was on fire every night; nobody knew for what reason nor what was the quarter that was to burn next'.¹³ Much damage was also done by fire in March 1769 when several palaces, two churches and many houses were destroyed.¹⁴ The urban character of the city, however, must not be exaggerated. We learn from Bruce that most of the ordinary houses were surrounded by two or more *wanza*¹⁵ trees and that scavenging was carried out exclusively by hyenas who filled the place from dusk till dawn.¹⁶

As the first European traveller to describe the city, Poncet's account is naturally of considerable interest. Though his remarks on the buildings he saw were ridiculed in Europe where experts on Ethiopian affairs had been taught by Ludolphus and others to believe in a moving capital, it was, as we now know, a fairly accurate description. The palace, he wrote, was 'great and spacious' and its situation 'very fine'. It was in the middle of the town surrounded by a walled enclosure almost a league in compass and situated on a rising which overlooked the country round about. The walls were of freestone, flanked with towers. There were four imperial chapels within the enclosure served by a hundred religious persons, who had also the care of a college where they taught the officers of the palace to read the Holy Scriptures.¹⁷

He added that though there were some houses at Gondar 'built after the European fashion', the greater part were traditional Ethiopian *tukuls* which, he said, resembled a 'tunnel' or cone with the mouth downward. 'Altho' the extent of the town be three or four leagues,' he wrote, 'it has not the beauty of ours; nor can it have, because the houses are of one story and (there are) no shops. This does not hinder but that they have a great

10. Guidi, *Annales Iohannis I, Iyasu I et Bakaffa*, p. 187.

11. *ibid.*, p. 224.

12. *ibid.*, p. 336.

13. Bruce, Vol. III, pp. 194-5.

14. Guidi, *Annales Regum Iyasu II et Iyoas*, p. 254.

15. Bruce, Vol. II, pp. 623-4. *Cordia abyssinica*.

16. *ibid.*, Vol. V, pp. 54, 108.

17. Poncet, pp. 120-1.

trade. All the merchants meet in a wide, spacious place to treat of their affairs. There they expose their merchandize to sale. The market lasts from morning to night. All sorts of commodities are sold there. Everyone has his own proper place where he exposes upon mats what he has to sell.¹⁸ The Muslims of the city, called *jabartis*,¹⁹ were 'tolerated', but lived in a separate quarter, presumably in accordance with the edicts of 1668 and 1678 promulgated by the Emperor Yohannes I, which, as we shall see, instituted segregation for the Falasha and Muslim populations.²⁰ The Christians and Muslims, Poncet adds, both ate meat only if it had been slaughtered according to their own traditional rites.²¹

Though he does not attempt to estimate the population of the city, he suggests that it was large by declaring that it was three or four leagues (i.e. nine to twelve miles) in circumference, that it possessed a hundred²² churches and that the Ethiopian Patriarch had told him that 'at one ordination alone he had made ten thousand priests and six thousand deacons'.²³

In his historical chapters Bruce relates that Iyasu II (1730–1755) continued the work of embellishing the city which Fasiladas and Iyasu I had begun. He built a 'large and expensive villa' at Azazo, with spacious gardens and groves of oranges and lemons,²⁴ and an elaborately decorated palace in the Riggobeeber quarter of Gondar. The Queen Mother, Mentuab, also earned great distinction by endowing the beautiful church at nearby Qesquam which, like the famous castles, is a living monument to the greatness of this period of Ethiopian history.²⁵

Iyasu II was assisted in the decoration of his palace, Bruce says, by Greek refugees from Smyrna. The presence chamber was finished 'in a manner truly admirable' by these craftsmen who obtained the assistance of half-caste workers, 'the sons of Greek artists whose fathers were dead'. The skirting was of ivory four

18. *ibid.*, p. 121.

19. The term *jabarti* was often used for an Ethiopian Muslim. *Vide* Trimmingham, p. 150 and n; Bruce, Vol. III, p. 198.

20. Guidi, *Annales Iohannis I, Iyasu I et Bakaffa*, pp. 8, 36–7.

21. Poncet, p. 125.

22. Monti della Corte in a study published in Rome in 1938 was able to list forty-four Gondar churches built during or before the Imperial period. Monti della Corte, *I Castelli di Gondar*, pp. 99–102. *Vide* also Bent, p. 12.

23. Poncet, pp. 122–3.

24. Bruce, Vol. II, pp. 445–6.

25. For a list of the presents given to this church see Guidi, *Annales Regum Iyasu II, et Iyoas*, pp. 102–6.

feet from the ground and above it were placed three rows of mirrors from Venice, joined together and fixed in frames of copper or covered with gold. The roof was the work of Ethiopian Jews (Falashas) and consisted of 'painted cane, split and disposed in Mosaic figures' which produced 'a gayer effect' than it was possible to conceive. The Emperor, it appears, was charmed with the 'multiplicity of works and workmen' and took great interest in the decoration; 'he even wrought with his own hand, and rejoiced at seeing the facility with which, by the use of a compass and a few straight lines, he could produce the figure of a star equally exact with any of his Greeks. Bounty followed bounty. The best villages, and those near the town were given in property to the Greeks'.²⁶ The Emperor, he asserts, was much criticized by his compatriots for these activities; mock annals were composed recording his expeditions to the estates of his Greek friends. Bruce reports that stung by these lampoons, Iyasu embarked upon a campaign against the kingdom of Sennar. The troops failed to capture Sennar, but returned to the capital with a considerable number of cattle seized on the way.²⁷

Iyasu then returned to work on the decoration of his palace, and, we are told, put in position many Venetian mirrors. The expenditure on glassware was so great that when Abuna Krestodoulos died in 1742, Iyasu's coffers were empty as his money was 'all gone to Venice for mirrors'. In order to raise the funds needed to fetch another Abuna from Cairo he was obliged to lay a small tax on the churches, saying in jest that 'the Abuna and the crosses were maintained and repaired by the public', but that it was 'incumbent upon the church to purchase new ones when they were worn out'. The Naib of Arkiko, as we shall see, put obstacles in the way of procuring the Abuna, but subsequently sent the Emperor a peace offering in the shape of more mirrors.²⁸

Confirmation of Poncet's glowing description of Gondar came from Abram, an Ethiopian who discussed his country's capital with Sir William Jones in Calcutta in 1787 and 1788. His answers to Sir William's inquiries were 'so precise and his whole demeanour so remote from any suspicion of falsehood' that the latter considered them worthy of publication. Abram said that

26. Bruce, Vol. II, pp. 633-4.

27. *ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 636.

28. *ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 642.

the city was 'nearly as large and populous' as 'Misr or Kahera' (Cairo?) which he had seen on his pilgrimage to Jerusalem, that all the walls of the houses were of red stone and the roofs of thatch, that the streets were like those of Calcutta, and that the ways by which the King passed were 'very spacious'. He also described the palace, which had a plastered roof, resembled a fortress and stood in the heart of the city.²⁹

Bruce estimated the city's population in his day at no less than ten thousand families in times of peace. On the estimate of six or seven persons to a family made half a century later by Rüppell, this would indicate a population of some sixty to seventy thousand people and make the city by far the biggest urban centre on the Horn of Africa. The Muslims of the city, he said, occupied three thousand houses, 'some of them spacious and good', while there was a further 'large town of Mahometans of of about a thousand houses on the other side of the nearby River Kahha'.³⁰

During the reign of Iyasu I (1682-1706) the measurement of property in the surrounding province of Begemder is said to have been undertaken. The modern Ethiopian writer, Balambaras Mahteme Sellassie, sometime Minister of Agriculture, who states that these boundaries are still to be seen, relates: 'At that period the person who had first put the land under cultivation was recognized as the proprietor. When the land was measured the owners were allowed only one-third of the area they were occupying, the other two-thirds returning to the State. Of the two-thirds taken by the State, one half was given to the churches.' The private land owners, he adds, also gave some additional pieces of land to ensure that churches maintained at their expense would be established on their estates. 'The rest of the land taken by the State was distributed in part to nobles and soldiers by way of salary, in part to the peasants (*gabars*) who had to pay for the use of this land a tax in kind, such as honey or salt. When the land allowed to a soldier or to a peasant was vacated by him it was given to another who had to pay the tax; if he cultivated only a part of the soil he gave a fifth of his produce. He had no more to pay if he converted to pasture the part of his land which had lain fallow.'³¹

29. Jones, p. 383.

30. Bruce, Vol. III, pp. 198, 380-1.

31. Mahteme Selassie, pp. 284, 288. *Vide* also Gabra Wald Ingida Warq, p. 8.

Agriculture appears to have prospered in the vicinity of the capital. A city of such size naturally exerted a significant influence in developing a commercial spirit among the peasants of the surrounding countryside. Thus Abram told Sir William Jones in Calcutta that the markets of Gondar abounded in pulse, and had wheat and barley, 'but no rice'; and that the inhabitants obtained sheep and goats in plenty, and were very fond of milk, cheese and whey. Bruce confirmed that the city and the neighbouring country depended for the necessities of life – cattle, honey, butter, wheat, hides, wax and a number of other commodities – upon the Agaos to the south of Lake Tana, some of whom came from as far as one hundred miles, and arrived in the capital 'a thousand and fifteen hundred at a time'.³² He relates that at Masqala Kristos, not far from Dingleber on the west coast of the lake, he passed a troop of Agaos bound for Gondar, laden with honey, butter and untanned hides, and taking with them about eight hundred head of cattle.³³ The butter bought by these tribesmen was preserved by the addition of a yellow, carrot-like root called *moqmoqo*.^{34 35} The province of Wagara to the north-east of the city was reckoned the 'granary of Gondar', though its grain was inferior to that of the low-lying areas of Dambea and Fogera on either side of the lake. Bruce relates that the price of provisions rose as he passed through the province on the way to the capital and that the district of Chagassa – some three hours' journey from it – was 'rich and well cultivated' and derived its support from the metropolis, 'the mart of its produce'.³⁶ The regions of Dreega and Karoota, on the borders of Begemder, seem also to have relied on the Gondar market, for he states that in the whole country they alone provided wine – a statement which Abram corroborates with regard to Karoota.³⁷ The town of Emfras on the east coast of Lake Tana supplied the city with tents which were carried, together with other baggage, and erected by the Muslim inhabitants of a village immediately outside the capital.³⁸ Shanqella and other tribesmen treked in with elephants' teeth, rhinoceros horns, gold in small pellets and a

32. Bruce, Vol. III, p. 736.

33. *ibid.*, Vol. IV, p. 27.

34. *Rumex abyssinicus*.

35. *ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 736.

36. *ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 191, 192, 195, 284.

37. *ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 253, 284, 335, 394; Jones, p. 384.

38. *ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 376; Vol. V, p. 31; Vol. II, p. 381.

quantity of very fine cotton. He adds, with what accuracy it is difficult to gauge, that to ensure trade security, which was from time to time endangered by Gondarine slave-raiding expeditions, city-dwellers and tribesmen often sent some of their children to dwell with each other; the children frequently married into the adopted household with the result that the families concerned were generally in good relations for perhaps a generation.³⁹ Finally useful manual labour was supplied by the Falashas, or Jews, who lived in small villages on the outskirts of Gondar and served as masons and thatchers of houses.⁴⁰ The whole area directly affected by the capital was thus perhaps the size of Wales.

The capital's dependence on the neighbouring areas was not, however, without grave disadvantage in time of trouble. During the reign of Iyoas I (1755-1769), for example, famine broke out in the city on account of civil war in Wagara and insecurity on the road from Damot.⁴¹ Bruce relates that in his time, too, any calamity happening in the country of the Agaos was 'severely felt by the inhabitants of Gondar'.⁴²

The establishment of Gondar was accompanied by a certain amount of bridge building, which, as we shall see, had been rare in Ethiopian history. Seven stone bridges in the region are popularly attributed to Fasiladas and are individually referred to as *Fasil dildil*, or Fasil bridge. Three of these bridges could still be used by wheeled traffic three centuries later at the time of the Italian occupation (1936-1941). One, called the 'Devil's bridge', was situated at the junction of the Kaha and Angareb rivers, another spanned the Angareb in the valley north of the city, while the third lay to the south on the road beyond Ifag.⁴³

Bruce, describing wage rates at Gondar, records in one of his notebooks that a maidservant normally received fifteen salt bars, or *amolés*, a year and her food. A manservant was paid four *patacas*, or dollars, a year plus a daily ration of two thin pieces of *injera*, the pancake-like bread which was the staple diet. If his master was good he would also sometimes give him a little

39. *ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 737.

40. *ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 195.

41. *ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 684.

42. *ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 662. *Vide* also Vol. III, pp. 370, 375, 535, Vol. IV, p. 61.

43. Monti della Corte, pp. 57-9; *vide* also *Guida dell' Africa Orientale Italiana*, p. 386; Bruce, Vol. III, pp. 194, 382, 386, 424.

meat, lentils or vetches. The employer was not normally expected to clothe him, but might occasionally present him with a pair of trousers.

With regard to the cost of carriage to Gondar Bruce noted that three bundles of wood from Chagassa – three hours' distance away – cost a salt bar. The same sum would pay for the transportation of a jar of wine or honey weighing three *faranzala* from Emfras, a journey of eight hours. The value of the *amolé* at this time and place may be judged from the fact that it was said to buy thirty-three pieces of *injera* or a pair of shoes.⁴⁴

44. Bruce, Vol. V, p. 77; *ibid.*, 3rd ed., Vol. VII, p. 79.

Chapter 8

The Army

THE EMPERORS OF ETHIOPIA had for centuries been able to collect and command large armies of foot and horse soldiers who carried shields and tents and fought with bows and arrows, spears and swords.¹ Francesco Suriano reported in 1482 that the monarch could put in the field a force of not less than two or three hundred thousand people,² infinitely more than any potential enemy. Ibn Fadl Allah, writing between 1342 and 1349, states that the armed forces of the Muslim sultanates, though large, were considerably smaller. Hadya, 'the most powerful of all', had forty thousand cavalry and an immense number of infantry'. Ifat and Dawaro had each about fifteen thousand horsemen and twenty thousand foot soldiers, Bali eighteen thousand horse- and a mass of foot-men, Arababni nearly ten thousand cavalry and 'very numerous' infantry, Sharkha three thousand horsemen and at least twice that number of infantry, and Dara, the weakest province, two thousand horse and as many foot.³ Alvares, writing almost two centuries later, stated that the Emperor could rally a hundred thousand men in a matter of days and that the number of people accompanying the court was 'scarcely credible'.

Despite its size, however, the army could not command an adequate supply of weapons because of the isolation and technical backwardness of the country. At the end of his visit Alvares reported to the Archbishop of Braga in Portugal that though the Ethiopians possessed a plentiful supply of lances and shields, as well as 'many bows and arrows', which incidentally were not feathered, they were otherwise poorly equipped. They had a few swords, a handful of long and narrow coats of mail, which the Portuguese considered of inferior quality, two swivel guns, a small quantity of helmets, which had been obtained from the mission, and a mere fourteen muskets which had recently been purchased from the Turks. The Emperor Lebna Dengel (1508–

1. Gaudefroy-Demombynes, pp. 9, 25–6.

2. *Ethiopian Itineraries*, p. 45.

3. Gaudefroy-Demombynes, pp. 6, 14–9.

1540) appears to have been conscious of the precariousness of his position, and, according to Alvares, had ordered his men to learn to shoot.⁴

Discussing the matter of armament with the Portuguese mission he explained that he was in no way short of retainers or even of ammunition, as sulphur could be found in his kingdoms and there were craftsmen to make saltpetre. 'All that his armies lacked was the use of artillery and someone to teach them to work it, because he could marshal innumerable carabineers with whom he would subdue all the neighbouring Moorish kings.' Alvares confirms that there were 'mountains of sulphur' and that a Genoese at the court told him 'that more saltpetre ought to be made in these Kingdoms than anywhere in the world'.⁵ Bermudes, who returned to Ethiopia in 1541 during the war against Ahmad Grañ, confirms that the ingredients of gunpowder were in good supply. 'We had plenty of material to make powder,' he states, 'because there is in that country a large amount of saltpetre, of sulphur, and of osiers for charcoal, which we made very excellent.'⁶ The Jesuits, though more cautious, write in substantially similar terms; Almeida states that there was 'no lack of sulphur, particularly in Tigre', and that considerable quantities of saltpetre would probably be found if a diligent search was made, while Barradas says that the best sulphur was to be found at Senafe and much saltpetre at Gralta.⁷

Soldiers were generally speaking neither paid nor supplied with provisions by the state though many lords, courtiers and even minor functionaries, such as trumpeteers, received grants of land in return for their services.⁸ Every man was obliged to take with him, or to entrust to his servants, family or camp followers, the supplies of grain or flour he might require during the campaign. It was also customary to rely to a great extent on commandeering cattle and other commodities in the lands through which the army passed.⁹

Grañ's invasion and the subsequent intervention of the Portuguese brought about a revolution in armament which put the

4. Alvarez, p. 410.

5. See note 1 on p. 137.

6. Whiteway, p. 229.

7. Almeida, pp. 43-4; Beccari, Vol. IV, p. 101.

8. Alvarez, p. 154; Perruchon, *Histoire d'Eskender*, *passim*. Vide also Gaudefroy-Demombynes, pp. 13-14.

9. Alvarez, p. 340.

Ethiopian forces at a great disadvantage. Firearms had been introduced into Arabia in 1515, some twelve years before the opening of the Muslim conqueror's campaign against Ethiopia. Aided by the policy of the Turks and also by the Catalans who were the trade rivals of the Portuguese, Muslim merchants soon imported these new weapons into Africa through the port of Zeila.¹⁰ Grañ took full advantage of the improved armament of his co-religionists. Though inferior in numbers his forces could always count on vastly superior fire power. His chronicler, Arab-Faqih, states that on his first campaign, in addition to some seven thousand foot soldiers, mostly Somalis, he mustered two hundred cavalry men armed with matchlocks, mainly Turks from Zabid on the Red Sea coast of Arabia.¹¹ This numerically modest force successfully challenged the Emperor's army which included contingents from Tigre,¹² Gojam, Begemder, Angot, Qeda, Gan, the Red Sea coast, that is to say the province of the Bahrnagash, and a certain number of Agaos.¹³

On 7 or 9 March 1529, at the great battle of Shembera-Kure the first decisive clash of arms in Shoa, Arab-Faqih estimated the Muslim army at 560 horse and 12,000 foot-soldiers and that of the Emperor at 16,000 cavalry and more than 200,000 infantry; Ethiopian accounts, on the other hand, put the invading forces at 300 horse and very few foot and their own at over 3,000 horse and 'innumerable' foot-men.¹⁴ Whatever the exact numbers may have been Grañ was completely victorious, his chronicler putting the casualties at 5,000 Muslims and 10,000 Christians.¹⁵ An interesting feature of this and subsequent battles was the use of archers on both sides: Grañ was supported by Somali archers of the Merraihan, Yiberri and Girri (Gerri?) tribes, as well as by a number of Arabs, while the Emperor's army included in its ranks archers from Tigre and Agame, as well as about 3,000 men of the Maya or El Maya tribe¹⁶ who used poisoned arrows.¹⁷

10. Whiteway, p. xxxii; Trimingham, p. 86.

11. Arab-Faqih, p. 50; Whiteway, pp. xxii-iii.

12. Arab-Faqih elsewhere refers to the existence of a cavalry force of one hundred and fifty Nubian slaves in the Tigre army. Arab-Faqih, p. 240.

13. Arab-Faqih, pp. 79-81.

14. *ibid.*, pp. 116-17; Whiteway, xxxv.

15. Arab-Faqih, p. 130.

16. The home of this people is uncertain. *Vide* *ibid.*, pp. 82-3 n.

17. *ibid.*, pp. 108, 110-3, 121, 185, 294, 322, 361.

Before embarking on what he conceived as the final conquest of Ethiopia, Grañ sent to Zeila for further supplies which included 7 cannon as well as large quantities of guns and swords. He was also joined by 70 men from Mahra in South Arabia – some of them archers – who wished to help him in his ‘Holy War’.¹⁸ According to Arab-Faqih, his forces now amounted to some 500 cavalry and 12,000 infantry, a figure which excluded a large number of carriers. The Emperor’s forces, on the other hand, were estimated by the same authority at 6,000 horse – some of whom had coats of mail – and 100,000 foot.¹⁹ This force was nevertheless unable to resist the power of the Muslims’ superior weapons. At the battle of Antakyah an olive tree standing in the centre of the Ethiopian army was cut in two by the first shot of the invaders’ cannon. Arab-Faqih claims that the Christians thereupon ‘tumbled the one on the other’ and were immediately defeated.²⁰ The use of cannon, or even the fear that they would be used, undoubtedly played a decisive role in destroying the morale of the Emperor’s forces.²¹

In due course, however, the Emperor’s army succeeded in acquiring a number of these weapons, for Arab-Faqih relates that the Muslims captured six from the ‘infidels’, i.e. Christians, in the Hawash area.²² Later, describing fighting in 1533, he declares that the Tigre contingent was supported by one or two cannon fired by two renegade ‘Arabs’, Hasan el Basri and Abd Asfar Turki, who, to judge by their names, were probably a person from Basra and a Turk. Grañ, however, still enjoyed overwhelming superiority of arms; at about this time he sent one of his subordinates, Urjai Abun, to Zeila to purchase further supplies; the latter returned with a huge cannon of bronze, two small ones of iron and two Indian technicians to operate them.²³ The resistance of the Christians was for a time broken down; the chronicle of the Emperor Galawdewos states that the Ethiopian forces fell at one time to a mere sixty or seventy horsemen and as many infantry, though he was nonetheless often victorious.²⁴

Cristovão da Gama, who landed at Massawa on 4 July 1541 to bring Portuguese help to the hard-pressed Emperor, was accompanied, according to Castanhoso, by 400 or 450 ‘very well

18. *ibid.*, pp. 170–2.

19. *ibid.*, pp. 183, 199.

20. *ibid.*, pp. 185–6.

24. Conzelman, p. 128; Bruce, Vol. II, p. 175 et seq.

21. *ibid.*, pp. 329, 334; Bruce, Vol. II, p. 186.

22. Arab-Faqih, pp. 218, 240–1.

23. *ibid.*, pp. 407–8.

armed' Portuguese soldiers and 130 slaves carrying over 600 matchlocks as well as 8 field pieces and 100 swivel guns which were to be used to good advantage.²⁵ He says that Grañ's army at that time numbered about 15,000 foot soldiers 'all archers and bucklermen'²⁶ (Bruce puts this figure at only 5,000), as well as 200 Turkish arquebusiers²⁷ or matchlockmen of whom 'they thought a great deal' and with whom they had conquered almost all Ethiopia.²⁸ The arrival of the Portuguese with their superior weapons obliged Grañ to seek reinforcements and supplies from Arabia. Castanhoso tells us that in return for 'much money' the Muslims obtained a further 900 (or, as Bruce says, 100) Turkish arquebusiers from Zabid, 'very fine and good men', as well as many Arabs and a further 20 Turkish horsemen with gilt stirrups, each horse shod with iron. He also received 10 field bombards, or cannon, which he valued highly, as the handful of field pieces with which he had overrun Ethiopia seem no longer to have been in use.²⁹

The Ethiopians now rallied to the Emperor's cause; Castanhoso estimates the joint Ethiopian-Portuguese army in February 1543 at 8,000 footmen with bows and bucklers, 500 horse 'all very fine' and 120 Portuguese, some of whom were maimed.³⁰ Bruce, on the other hand, puts the Ethiopian contingent at 12,000, mostly foot soldiers. By the time the war was over the Emperor's army had swollen, Castanhoso says, to over 100,000 souls, though the actual number of combatants was still no more than about 20,000 foot and 2,000 horse.³¹

After the defeat of Grañ conditions gradually returned to normal, though the Turkish occupation of Massawa in 1557 resulted in a blockade at the port aimed against the importation of arms.³² The Emperor Sartsa Dengel (Malak Sagad I, 1563-1597) nevertheless showed some military genius in consolidating his dominions. Not only did he repulse the Turks who, as we shall see, were attempting to establish themselves in Eritrea, but he also waged many victorious campaigns against Agao, Falasha, Nilotic and Sidama tribes, repelled Galla advances and succeeded

25. Whiteway, pp. 11, 11 n, 22, 26, 45; Blundell, p. 364.

26. Bucklers, a type of shield.

27. Arquebus, a type of hand-gun.

28. Whiteway, p. 44; Bruce, Vol. II, p. 183.

29. Whiteway, p. 55; Bruce, Vol. II, p. 185; Conzelman, pp. 135-6. For the Emperor's report on these events see Whiteway, pp. 119-21.

30. Whiteway, p. 75. 31. *ibid.*, p. 94. 32. Beccari, Vol. IV, p. 155.

in converting the chiefs of Enarea and Gurage. 'Perpetual campaigning', writes Budge, 'made his army a perfect instrument in his hands. . . . There was no civil war in any part of (his) dominions, and the people who lived on the fruits of the king's conquests were prosperous.'³³

Almeida and Barradas both afford us useful glimpses of the armament and organization of the Ethiopian army several decades later.

'The arms they use,' Almeida says, 'are *zargunchos*, which are a kind of half-length lance that have thin hafts and irons that are sometimes narrow, like those of our lances, sometimes broad like halberds but this so that they can be thrown vigorously against some and manoeuvred against others, in the way they do, brandishing it with one hand only while they manipulate the shield with the other. They make shields of the skin of the wild buffalo, very strong and firm. Every soldier usually carries two *zargunchos*, one of the narrow sort that is thrown in the first encounter with great force so that it pierces mail and shields, and another, broader one with which they continue the fight, as sword and shield are used among us.' The men of highest rank have swords but they rarely use them except in peace-time for appearance sake. They also carry certain clubs of hard and heavy wood that they call *Bolotas*,³⁴ and their daggers or short swords that they use when they come to close quarters, and to struggling with each other; they also throw them.

'The horsemen strike and fight only with short lances in the style of our javelins. Those who have coats of mail, and they are not many, do not trouble themselves with the shield so as to be less encumbered. They do, however, carry some narrow *zargunchos* to throw like darts. Today muskets too are found in this country, but there are few who would be able to shoot well with them.'³⁵

Barradas, who gives a more detailed account of these weapons, says that there were many different types of spear each with its own distinctive name indicating the length of its shaft, the shape of its head, and so forth.³⁶ Swords were both locally made and imported, the latter being greatly esteemed if well tempered

33. Budge, Vol. II, p. 372. *Vide* also Halevy, *passim*.

34. Amharic *bolota*, a club.

35. Almeida, pp. 76-7.

36. *Vide* Baeteman, cols. 117-18.

and ornamented with gold, silver or tin. Firearms were also highly prized and were entering the country in increasing quantities despite the Turkish blockade, partly as gifts to the Emperor and his governors, partly as contraband, and partly as booty captured in encounters with Turkish raiding parties, no fewer than two hundred muskets being on one occasion acquired in this way. Bows and arrows were no longer widely used except by some of the men of Tigre.³⁷

‘When he musters his forces’, Almeida continues, ‘the Emperor puts into the field 30,000 to 40,000 soldiers, 4,000 or 5,000 on horseback and the rest on foot. Of the horses up to 1,500 may be jennets of quality, some of them very handsome and strong, the rest jades and nags. Of these horsemen as many as 700 or 800 wear coats of mail and helmets. All the rest of them, whether on foot or horseback have no arms except what I have mentioned above, *zarguncho* and shield. They have more than 1,500 muskets, but not more than 400 or 500 musketeers are found on expeditions and most of them have so little skill that they cannot fire more than once in any action. It cannot be otherwise for gunpowder and balls are so scarce that there are not many who have enough to practise 4 shots at a target now and again in the year. Some of the grandees do it from time to time but then only upon a rest. As in action against the Gallas and other enemies there is not time to use it, what they have learnt to do with it is of little value to them.’³⁸

Barradas draws a similar conclusion, stating that though guns were in great demand most of the nobles carried them only for ostentation, and in many cases were unable to use them as they had no gunpowder.³⁹

The Ethiopians, Almeida argued, lacked the discipline of Europe with the result that armies and squadrons did not open and close in an orderly fashion; on the contrary battles began and ended with the first onset, for one side or the other showed its heels and the other followed up victory. Flight was not much decried because it was ‘a common and everyday thing’.

Army camps, he says, seemed ‘excessively big’ because the camp followers and members of the baggage train were more

37. Beccari, Vol. IV, pp. 155–7; *vide* also Vol. II, p. 215.

38. Almeida, pp. 77–8.

39. Beccari, Vol. IV, pp. 155–6.

numerous than the actual fighting men: 'The reason is that usually there are more women than men in the camp. Besides the King's being accompanied by the Queen and all or nearly all the ladies who are usually at court, widows, married ladies and even unmarried ones, and the wives of the chief lords and captains, so that they go to war with their households and families, besides this, every soldier has one or many. The King does not feed them. . . . They have to make their *apas*⁴⁰ every day and for that they must grind meal, which is entirely women's work. . . . For great men the honey wine they drink goes on being made and there have to be many women to carry it, though many people take it in big horns which travel on baggage oxen. As, however, it is all very quickly used up many women go along with *caloes*⁴¹ of honey for making a fresh supply. Besides this there is the great throng of *Ataris* (beer sellers) who are wine and *sava*⁴² (beer) tapsters and at the same time merchants selling cloth and other necessities. All these people amount to so many that when ten thousand soldiers march, the number in the encampment is usually over thirty thousand souls, and when the Emperor marches with his entire force the whole multitude is over a hundred or a hundred and twenty thousand. . . .

'I omit to describe the manner in which the Emperor marches with his army because here I find nothing remarkable or that does not exist in other countries. So long as it is going through friendly country, far from enemies, there is no order except that the *Fitaurari* goes in front. This is what they call the captain of the vanguard, who performs a marshal's duty, chooses the place where the camp is to be, and when it has been chosen, raises a standard in the centre or on some high ground as a signal that the Emperor's tents are to be pitched there. When this is seen all the rest know their positions and place their tents accordingly. On the way they proceed without any order at all. Only where the Emperor goes, his shalms or trumpets go in front, which do not sound bad after their fashion, and his kettle-drums, of which there are usually three or four pairs, each on its she- or he-mule, and on their cruppers ride the men who beat them. On the right go four or five very strong horses, well caparisoned with trap-

40. *Apas* is a word of Dravidian origin used for a pancake-like bread eaten in India which resembles Ethiopian *injera*.

41. Large earthenware jars.

42. *Siwa*, Tigrinya, or *Talla*, Amharic.

pings of gilded silver, and also one or two of the Emperor's she-mules as reliefs for he and the rest always ride she-mules. His Highness mounts and dismounts inside his tent. If he alights on the road the men near him surround him and hide him with the cloths that they wear as cloaks. Then they bring him a couch which always travels near at hand, because his habit is to rest on it on rugs and cushions of rich silks. Even at home this is his usual seat and throne.

'Near the Emperor travels his *Azages* and the chief lords who accompany him. On the way he always wears his crown of fine gold with some seed-pearls. Precious stones have never been seen or used in Ethiopia. He also takes his silk umbrella which came to him from India, like those in use there. Those muffling and cloaking curtains by which former Emperors were so enclosed that nobody could see them do not now exist. On the contrary from time to time he gallops his jennet, dismounting from his she-mule to do so, and trampling over the field as I have sometimes seen. When the enemy is near at hand the army proceeds with more order and in closer formation, with closed squadrons; the vanguard does not advance far ahead nor the rearguard fall far behind. The wings proceed in extended formation, keeping the Emperor with some of his guards and some lords and ladies in the centre and leaving sufficient ground for the baggage to travel enclosed and safe.'⁴³

'Generally speaking', Almeida elsewhere remarks, 'it can be said that the Ethiopians are good troops; they sit a horse well, are quite strong and healthy and are brought up and inured to toil, enduring hunger and thirst as much as can be imagined, and so they continue in the field for the greater part of the year, suffering all the discomfort and inclemency of sun, cold and rain with very little food. In war they are reared as children, in war they grow old, for the life of all who are not farmers is war. So that they should follow soldiering and continue to do so the Emperor grants them the lands on which they live and which they enjoy inasmuch as they serve him. As soon as they fail him he gives the lands to others. This and nothing else, is their pay. Hence it arises that the Emperor assembles a large army without much expense.'⁴⁴

43. Almeida, pp. 78-81.

44. *ibid.*, p. 218.

A certain amount of compulsion to fight, at least during the period of the conflict with the Portuguese, is suggested by Barradas who mentions the existence of a fine for villeins failing to go to war. He says that on one occasion he was asked by some peasants to intervene on their behalf with their governor Takla Giyorgis; the latter, he says, replied with 'reason and justice' as follows: 'Father, these villeins are like camels; they cry and groan when they are loaded, but in the end they carry the load that is put on them.'⁴⁵

Ludolphus, who had doubtless discussed the matter with his informant Gregory, accepts Almeida's estimate of the size of the Emperor's forces. 'The biggest Army which the King brings now into the Field,' he says, 'hardly amounts to Forty thousand Men, among which he has not above Four or Five thousand Horse, and the rest are all Foot. Their horses are courageous and mettlesome, but they never get upon their backs till they are ready to charge the Enemy. At other times they ride their Mules and lead their Horses.'^{46 47}

The Gallas, who had been pouring into Ethiopia since the time of Grañ, were now a force to be reckoned with. It is said that they learnt to ride horses from the Somalis at a relatively late period, but rapidly became excellent horsemen. The Ethiopian monk Bahrey, who wrote a history of the tribe in 1592 or 1593 says that they acquired this skill during the presidency of their fifth *luba* (chief) Muchale (Mesle) i.e. *circa* 1554-1562. Mesle is supposed to have alluded to this development by declaring, 'I made men who went on three legs go on four.' 'He said "three",' Bahrey explains, 'because of the *zarguncho* (spear) which those on foot sometimes use as a walking-stick.'⁴⁸

Bermudes described the Gallas in this period as 'a fierce and cruel people' who made war on their neighbours, 'only to destroy and depopulate their countries'. 'In the places they conquer,' he adds, 'they slay all the men, cut off the privy parts of the boys, kill the old women, and keep the young for their own use and service.' These tribesmen, he explained, 'were innumerable, and

45. Beccari, Vol. IV, p. 187.

46. Arab-Faqih states that the same custom prevailed in Grañ's army. Arab-Faqih, p. 139. *Vide* also Alvarez, p. 218.

47. Ludolphus, p. 218.

48. *Some Records of Ethiopia*, p. 139; Lobo, p. 98. *Vide* also Trimmingham, p. 94.

did not come on without order like barbarians, but advanced collected in bodies, like squadrons'. 'A country like this,' he concluded, 'is quickly depopulated, for the inhabited places have no buildings that are defensible. . . . They have no other walls or fortresses, as the rocks are their fortresses.'⁴⁹

Almeida who, broadly speaking, confirms this picture of the Gallas says that they were governed by a *luba*, or chief, whom they chose every eight years. The first thing he did on being elected, Almeida says, was 'to assemble the best people he can and make several raids into the territories of the empire, in which he and his soldiers win fame and enrich themselves with much booty. This they call *Dela Guto*, or general muster. They all have the custom of not cutting the hair of their heads so long as they have not killed any enemy in war, or some courageous wild beast such as a tiger or lion. As soon as they do kill it, they shave their heads, leaving on the very top one lock like a *sinay*'.^{50 51}

The Gallas, he explains 'never cultivate land and sow nothing at all. They live on cattle which they pasture on wide expanses of country; they drink their milk and eat their flesh. This is all they live on, though when they invade the Abyssinians' territory, they also eat what food they find. The fact that they do not sow is of great use to them in that the Abyssinians cannot penetrate far into their country; when the Gallas know that they are invading with a strong army, they retire with their cattle many days' journey into the interior. The Abyssinians therefore never seize, or can seize supplies, and are thus compelled to withdraw to their own territories, often with heavy losses of men from sheer hunger'.⁵²

The Gallas, he continues, were excellent fighters. 'Generally speaking,' he says, 'they are of good physique and courageous. The weapons they use are few. The only defensive ones they use are shields, of double ox hide, though some have them made from the hides of buffalo as the Abyssinians do. Their offensive weapons are *zargunchos* like those of the Abyssinians and wooden clubs, which they throw as the Abyssinians do.' 'The first Gallas,' he adds, 'all used to fight on foot. They have had horses for

49. Whiteway, pp. 228-9. *Vide also Lettere annue di Ethiopia*, p. 4.

50. The reference is to a custom of the Saravasti Brahmins with whom the Portuguese were familiar in India.

51. Almeida, p. 138.

52. *ibid.*, p. 136. *Vide also Lettere annue di Ethiopia*, p. 5.

some years now, not as good as the Abyssinians, for they are nags, though capable of enduring great fatigue to which the Gallas accustom them, making them trot at half speed for whole days at a time. The saddles they use are very light, and very simply made; the stirrups of iron, very thin and narrow, for they do not put the foot into them, but only the big toe. This they learnt from the Abyssinians who all do the same, and therefore never ride with their shoes on, not even the Emperor himself.⁵³

'What makes the Gallas much feared', he concludes, 'is that they go to war and into battle determined and firmly resolved to conquer or die. The Emperor Seltan Çagued (Susneyos, 1607-1632) recognized this quality in them and in most of the Abyssinians the exact opposite. To this he used to ascribe the victories of the Gallas and the defeats and routs of the Abyssinians, though the latter are usually much more numerous and have better horses, muskets, helmets, and coats of mail in plenty. The Gallas do not usually come in bands of more than six or seven to eight thousand but these are mostly picked young men. The same Emperor used therefore to say that the Abyssinians could not possibly withstand their first onslaught. So he used to let them invade the country and steal the cattle and whatever else they found. He used then to wait in the way for them on their return. Their fury was then broken and they were thinking of reaching their country and securing and preserving the booty with which they were loaded. In this way he often defeated them.'⁵⁴

There was much armed conflict throughout this period. Gregory suggests in his correspondence with Ludolphus that the armies of Fasiladas (1632-1667) were reorganized after the expulsion of the Jesuits and the accompanying disorders. 'The King of Ethiopia', he wrote on 13 February 1655, 'has a large army and has three times as many horses as his father. . . . The rebels have surrendered and thrown themselves at his feet.'⁵⁵

The reign of Fasiladas was nevertheless characterized, like that of so many earlier monarchs, by difficulties with the Gallas whose political assimilation had scarcely begun. In 1648 the Yamani ambassador, Hasan bin Ahmad el Haimi, described this tribe as 'a people of great bravery, strong endurance, great numbers

53. *Vide* also Bruce, 3rd ed., Vol. VII, p. 78.

54. Almeida, pp. 137-8.

55. Flemming, p. 103.

and wide boundaries' who could endure long journeys and much suffering. Possessed of characteristics attributed by history to the Tartars, they threatened the empire in almost every direction and sometimes went into battle as much as one hundred thousand strong.⁵⁶ The Christians, he added, had been obliged to establish frontier posts to protect themselves against Galla incursions. One such post which he had seen was guarded by ten armed men who were changed every month. They had orders on seeing the Gallas advancing to warn the inhabitants, who thereupon fled to the summits of the highest mountains for safety, abandoning their houses and whatever possessions they could not take with them.⁵⁷

Poncet, as already remarked, mentions that the Emperor Iyasu I (1682-1706) spent much of his time in the field. So general was the fighting that in 1691 he was disturbed to discover, his chronicle relates, that women dressed as men had been participating in campaigns against the Gallas and had ridden spear in hand on mule-back, their tunics thrown up over their heads. He at once sent out a herald with a proclamation prohibiting the exposure of their persons in this fashion, and forbidding them to carry spears or lances, or to go on raids with the men.⁵⁸

Bruce says that towards the end of the eighteenth century the Emperor no longer wore his silver ornaments when on campaign, but carried a black and unadorned shield of good buffalo hide and a spear sharp-pointed with iron.⁵⁹ This, it must be emphasized, was a period of civil war when the powers of the monarch had been usurped by Ras Mikael, the governor of Tigre, and when the country was in a state of disorder. In the opinion of Bruce 'great exaggerations' had been used in speaking of the military power of Ethiopia. Excluding 'the wild Galla' beyond the Blue Nile he declared it his view that no Emperor 'ever commanded forty thousand effective men at any time, or upon any cause whatsoever exclusive of household troops'. The number of firearms, however, had increased tenfold since the departure of the Jesuits almost a century and a half earlier. Tigre, he said, could muster the largest number of muskets: no less than six thousand match locks, six times as many as the rest of Ethiopia;

56. Peiser, pp. 16-17.

57. *ibid.*, p. 26.

58. Guidi, *Annales Iohannis I, Iyasu I et Bakaffa*, p. 157.

59. Bruce, 1st ed., Vol. III, pp. 266-7.

its soldiers were 'very expert in the management of them, and were therefore the best in the empire.'⁶⁰ Begemder was the country's principal source of cavalry and it had been said that with Lasta it could bring out forty-five thousand men, though he thought this a 'great exaggeration'; when pleased with their general and the cause for which they fought they were 'exceedingly good soldiers', but at other times they were easily divided. The inhabitants of Lasta were also renowned in battle, being generally of great strength and stature: they were popularly referred to in Gondar as the peasants or barbarians of Lasta.⁶¹ The people of Amhara were reckoned the bravest of all. With their ordinary arms, the lance and the shield, they were often said to be superior to double the number of any other soldiers in the kingdom.⁶² The people of Gojam, though numerous, were held in the 'lowest esteem as soldiers'.⁶³

To the south, Shoa, though hedged in by Gallas on every side, was at last in a position to dispossess them, having the 'bravest and best' equipped cavalry, contingents of which were always sent to the Emperor in time of need.⁶⁴ They normally carried a single ten-foot long lance which they never abandoned and two light javelins, often made from cane growing by the banks of the Blue Nile, which they could throw a great distance.⁶⁵ The Gallas, Bruce said, had little iron; their principal arms were therefore lances or poles sharpened at the end and hardened in the fire. Their shields were made of bulls' hides, but being fashioned from a single fold, were liable to warp in the heat or become too pliable in wet weather.⁶⁶

The largest Ethiopian army to take the field, in Bruce's day, as far as he could learn from the oldest officers alive, was assembled before the battle of Sarbakusa in 1771 when the rebels numbered about fifty thousand men, a number which later swelled to above sixty thousand, 'cowards and brave, old and young, veteran soldiers and blackguards'; the Emperor's army during the fighting 'never amounted to twenty-six thousand men' and later fell to sixteen thousand, mostly from Tigre. These estimates, however, were not fully confirmed by Abram, the Ethiopian in Calcutta, who, describing the situation only a short

60. *ibid.*, Vol. IV, pp. 116, 63; Vol. II, p. 681.

61. *ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 252-3.

62. *ibid.*, Vol. III., pp. 254-5.

63. *ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 256.

64. *ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 255-6.

65. *ibid.*, Vol. IV, p. 18.

66. *ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 220.

while later, told Sir William Jones that the 'royal force' at Gondar was 'considerable'; he asserted 'perhaps at random' that it numbered 'near forty thousand horse and many troops armed with muskets, as well as lances, bows and arrows, scimitars and hangers'.⁶⁷ The steady increase in firearms was inevitably beginning to familiarize the Ethiopians with the hitherto very frightening sound of gunfire. This development, however, was by no means complete. Bruce records that though soldiers who had seen the effect of firearms were no longer afraid of them as formerly, others displayed a 'fatal and most unreasonable fear'.⁶⁸

Turning to the Emperor's 'household troops' with whom he was familiar from his prolonged residence in the capital, Bruce estimated that they consisted of about eight thousand infantry, two thousand of whom carried match locks and served instead of archers, bows and arrows having been abandoned about a century earlier by all save the Waito, Shanqella and other 'barbarous inconsiderable nations'. The household force was divided into four companies or regiments, each called a *bet* (house), and named after one of the Emperor's apartments, such as *Anbasa Bet*, or lion's house, *Wark saqala*, or gold house or palace.

Each company was under the command of a Shalaga (whom Bruce equated with a colonel) assisted by a number of subordinates, commanding twenty, fifty, or a hundred men. During Bruce's visit the four companies seldom amounted to more than sixteen thousand men each, though in former times when the Emperor was more powerful they had been four or five thousand strong and had 'great privileges' which enabled them to 'oppress the country'. When, however, the Emperor was weak they were 'kept incomplete out of fear and jealousy'.⁶⁹

There were also, it appears, some three hundred Shanqellas, who had been taken as slaves in childhood and educated at the Emperor's expense. They were clothed in coats of mail,⁷⁰ mounted on black horses, and 'commanded by foreigners entirely devoted to the King's will'.⁷¹

Describing the method of breaking camp Bruce observes:

67. Jones, p. 384.

68. Bruce, Vol. IV, pp. 116, 200; Vol. II, p. 705.

69. *ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 308-11.

70. *Vide ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 391, 638; Vol. IV, pp. 114, 117, 119, 132, 134.

71. *ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 551-2; *vide also* Vol. IV, pp. 116-18.

'Three proclamations are made before the king marches. The first is, "Buy your mules, get ready your provision, and pay your servants, for, after such a day, they that seek me here shall not find me." The second is about a week after, or according as the exigency is pressing; this is, "Cut down the *Kantuffa*⁷² in the four quarters of the world, for I do not know where I am going." This *Kantuffa* is a terrible thorn which very much molests the King and nobility in their march, by taking hold of their long hair, and the cotton cloth they are wrapped in. The third and last proclamation is, "I am encamped upon the Angrab, or Kahha; he that does not join me there, I will chastize him for seven years." I was long in doubt what this term of seven years meant, till I recollected the Jubilee year of the Jews with whom seven years was a prescription for offences, debts and all trespasses.'⁷³

72. *Pterobolium lacerans*, known in Tigrinya as *zalagiya*. *Vide* also Bruce, Vol. IV, pp. 65-6; Vol. V, pp. 49-51.

73. *ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 308-12. *Vide* also Guidi, *Annales Regum Iyasu II et Iyoas*, p. 261.

Chapter 9

The Effects of Warfare

THE ETHIOPIAN empire suffered from frequent warfare and the existence of large armies living on the lands through which they passed. The ravages of war, and of warring troops, led to immense destruction to life and property and created a general atmosphere of insecurity prejudicial to economic and social life. During the reign of Eskender (1478–1494), for example, an Ethiopian chronicler bemoans that, though the Emperor was valorous ‘his soldiers ruined all the people’,¹ while the chronicler of Sartsa Dengel (1563–1597) relates that on one occasion, in 1579, his master declared: ‘If I prolong my stay in Tigre the country will be ruined because our soldiers are numerous, indeed innumerable.’²

The campaigns of Ahmad Grañ from 1527 to 1543 were especially detrimental to the Christian highlands and were accompanied by an endless succession of spoliations, burnings and massacres, which are recorded in detail, though with some exaggeration, by the invader’s own chronicler, Arab-Faqih. Describing one of the first battles he declares: ‘The infidels broke before the Muslims like a flock of sheep before a lion. Thousands perished – God alone could count their number.’³ Arab-Faqih goes on to tell of the capture of prisoners who were sold into slavery and of the vast booty carried from the field of battle. The looting began even before the conquering army reached the Christian lands. Arab-Faqih tells how his master ravaged the country of the Habr Makadi(?) Somalis, who had refused him taxes; he reduced their villages to cinders, carried off their riches and acquired for his followers considerable booty in slaves and pack animals.⁴ The lust for booty inevitably spurred his followers to further plunder. To prevent dissension within his ranks while in the Hawash region he devised the plan of redistributing one-

1. Perruchon, *Histoire d’Eskander*, p. 357.

2. Conti Rossini, *Historia Regis Sarsa Dengel*, p. 94.

3. Arab-Faqih, p. 42.

4. *ibid.*, pp. 46–7.

fifth of the spoil to compensate those in his army who had succeeded in taking little or no booty.⁵ As they entered the lands inhabited by Christians, the invaders naturally intensified their ferocity. Grañ sent messages in all directions preaching the Holy War and calling on his co-religionists to join in the struggle. The opportunity of loot, his chronicler confirms, added to the glamour of this appeal and fortified the determination of the Muslims to fight against the infidel.⁶

The fertile lands of the interior, moreover, afforded a pleasant contrast to the barren lands of the intruders, and stimulated their religious fanaticism. It is impossible to mention more than a few incidents taken from many recorded by the chronicler.⁷ At Gendebelo (or Gendevelu) in Shoa Grañ's army killed the Christian merchants and seized all wealth belonging to the Emperor;⁸ at Eddir(?) the booty captured included two thousand five hundred slaves, five thousand cattle and innumerable mules;⁹ at Masin, in the province of Fatajar, the destruction was so complete that no trace of houses remained.¹⁰ Arab-Faqih claims that the loot was often so immense that it could not be transported. At the important church of Atronsa Maryām, for example, he relates that his comrades were amazed at the quantities of gold, silver and silk which they found. After pillaging from dawn to dusk each member of the band had three or four mule-loads of the articles he prized most and the church still seemed full of valuable silks; those which remained were therefore gathered together and burnt.¹¹

Inevitably the less fanatical members of the army became wearied of the endless campaigns and thought of returning with their plunder to their own lands. The chronicler relates that the Somalis, well satisfied with their booty, on one occasion collected the goats, mules, cows, donkeys, slaves and other loot and planned to return home with them. They resolved to ask Grañ's permission to withdraw from his army and determined to leave without his consent if he refused.¹² Grañ was not to be foiled in this manner; seeing that each man on the average had two

5. *ibid.*, pp. 55-6.

6. *ibid.*, pp. 70-1.

7. *Vide* also pp. 62, 67, 71, 73, 76, 131, 134, 137-9, 145-7, 156, 160-2, 174-5, 187, 191, 194-5, 213-15, 267, 269-70, 316, 325, 330-1, 418, 422, 465; Conzelman, p. 123.

8. Arab-Faqih, p. 62.

9. *ibid.*, p. 67.

10. *ibid.*, p. 101.

11. *ibid.*, pp. 312-3.

12. *ibid.*, pp. 206-7.

hundred mules and slaves, he realized that the Holy War he had unleashed was in danger of dissolving in self-complacency. He therefore ordered his followers to throw away the greater part of their belongings, warning them that he would cut off the head of anyone who disobeyed. His order to abandon the loot was carried out, we are told, with many tears and protests.¹³

Grañ's defeat, as we have seen, by no means resulted in an era of peace; on the contrary the emperors were constantly involved in fighting, particularly with the Gallas.

The problem of war is vividly described by Almeida, who emphasizes that the soldiers carried few provisions with them and were obliged to live on what they were given or could take from the places through which they marched and which they usually left 'almost as much ruined and plundered' as if the Gallas had invaded them. This was especially the case when the army remained in a district for some time, there being no alternative but for the Emperor or governor to assign certain places to the army which would then rob the peasants of all they could find.

'The custom of not taking supplies on campaign', he added, 'arises from another which is general throughout this country. It is that the inhabitants of any place are compelled to shelter and give food for one night to all travellers arriving there in the evening. The custom originates in the admirable rule of holy charity which teaches and commands that strangers should be sheltered, and at the same time in the difficulty of transporting provisions in this country, and in the lack of order and government, which means that inns cannot be established. It is a very heavy burden for the poor peasants on whom it all falls. Big companies of men, soldiers and lords bringing many servants come daily to quarter themselves in very small villages. Each one goes into the house he likes best and turns the owner into the street, or occupies it with him. Sometimes it is a widow or a married woman whose husband is away, and then by force he gets at not only her food and property, but her honour. Nor do those who receive them commonly deserve much in the sight of God, as they do it only under compulsion and from fear, so that the wretched and indigent rarely find anyone to receive them.'¹⁴

13. *ibid.*, p. 213. *Vide* also Basset, *Études*, pp. 97-103.

14. Almeida, pp. 79-80. *Vide* also Beccari, Vol. VIII, p. 52.

Ludolphus, who had probably discussed the matter with his friend Gregory, confirms this account, observing: 'The Poverty of the Souldiers impoverishes the Countries through which they march. For in regard it is a difficult thing to carry Provisions over such steep and rugged Mountains and long ways, they take by force what is not freely given to them; and by that means lay waste their own Countries no less than their enemies, whereby the poor country people are constrained to turn Souldiers, and so taught to deal by others as they were dealt with themselves.'¹⁵

The country was, moreover, 'very much infested with Robbers as well as Enemies'. These despoilers, he concluded, 'many times robb in Troops like Souldiers, and very much infest the Roads; and this without any searching after, or care to punish them, by reason that the King and the Governours being wholly busied with continual Wars had no time to ridd the Nation of these Vermin, who being pursu'd presently shelter themselves among the Rocks and Mountains.'¹⁶

Frequent warfare remained the curse of the country throughout the greater part of the period covered in the present study.¹⁷

15. Ludolphus, pp. 217-8.

16. *ibid.*, p. 219.

17. Conzelman, p. 133; Conti Rossini, *Historia Regis Sarsa Dengel*, pp. 25, 30, 31, 35-7, 43, 52-3, 62, 74, 76, 96-8, 115-16, 129-30, 134, 150, 157, 163, 174-8; Guidi, *Annales Iohannis I, Iyasu I et Bakaffa*, pp. 14, 17, 21, 26-8, 30, 32, 262, 278, 299, 319; *idem*, *Annales Regum Iyasu II et Iyoas*, pp. 118, 123, 135, 139-40, 153, 156, 158, 213, 218, 233, 244; Blundell, pp. 211, 218.

Chapter 10

State Revenues, Taxation, and Land Tenure

TRADITIONALLY the revenues of the Ethiopian sovereigns were of a non-monetary nature. They were paid and received in kind and in labour, as well as in gold and 'primitive money', such as cloth and salt, both of which, as we shall see, were widely used instead of coin. Because of the primarily agricultural character of the economy, taxation was mainly based on the land and its crops and livestock, though trade, and, to a lesser extent, weaving, were also taxed. The land was usually subjected to two types of tax: firstly, a fixed annual payment often of such articles as honey, butter or horses, and, secondly, a tithe or other percentage of actual production or wealth. Theoretically the sovereign was entitled to all such tribute, but in practice this right was waived in certain areas in favour of local governors who were allowed to appropriate the revenue in whole or in part for their own use and that of their families and followers; such personages, however, were expected to assist the emperor in one way or other: they had to send him gold or provisions and follow him to war. Land which was more or less completely exempt from the payment of tribute was also given to nobles and others for their own use in return for their loyalty and service. Such land, which was held at the emperor's pleasure, was known as *gult*, and was also given to ecclesiastics and religious establishments though usually on a more permanent basis. The revenues of the sovereign and provincial rulers (which must be conceived of in terms of service as well as of material goods) were thus, like so much else, a function of the system of land tenure.

The emperor and the governors, nobles and ecclesiastics who held land under him also received a type of rent, payable in produce or labour or both, from the tenants, or *gabars*, to whom they made land available. Finally a certain income was obtained from state domains the produce of which was either brought to the palace or devoted to purposes decided upon by the monarch.

The travellers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries have

left us valuable descriptions of the emperor's revenues and the system of taxation which had been reorganized in the fifteenth century, first by the Emperor Yeshaq I (1414-1429) with the assistance, as we shall see, of an Egyptian Copt, and later by the Emperor Zara Yaqob (1434-1468). Bruce, describing the second of these reorganizations, notes that Zara Yaqob had divided his country into 'separate governments, assigning to each the tax it should pay, at what time, in what manner, according to the situation and capacity of each province'. Special attention had been paid, he adds, to the lords of the Moorish states on account of the prosperity resulting from the extensive trade carried out by them, and 'the bad use they made of their riches by employing them in continual rebellions'.¹

As an indication of what he considered the great wealth of the empire Alvares gives a detailed description of the annual tribute, or *geber*, paid to the Emperor by the lords of Gojam and Tigre, the coastal province of the Bahrnagash and several lesser territories. The lords of Gojam, he said, paid mainly in gold, silk, mules, cows and plough oxen, those of Tigre in horses, and those of the province of the Bahrnagash in brocades, silks and cotton cloths.²

The largest tribute came from Gojam and was brought to the capital by the *Betudete* (*Bitwaded*), who was appointed by the Emperor Lebna Dengel (1508-1540) to collect it. It amounted to 30,000 *oqueas* (*waqets*)³ of gold, 3,000 mules, 3,000 horses, 30,000 cotton cloths of small value, each worth half a *dram*⁴ (of gold) or less, and 3,000 *basutos*,⁵ which he variously describes as 'hairy cotton cloths' and as pieces of cotton material 'fleecy like carpets' but 'not so close worked'; they were placed by the great people over their beds and were of 'a high value', often being worth between 1 and 5 *oqueas* (of gold).⁶

1. Bruce, Vol. II, p. 72.

2. Alvarez, p. 94.

3. More correctly *waqet*, a measurement of weight, approximately equal to an ounce, and mainly used for gold. Conzelman puts it at 33.105 grammes, i.e. 1.7 ounces avoirdupois. For various estimates *vide* Conzelman, p. 142 n; Bruce, 3rd ed., Vol. VII, p. 64; Whiteway, p. 161 n.

4. In Amharic *drim* and in Arabic *dirham*, corruptions of the Greek *drachma*, and according to Alvares, the equivalent of one-tenth of a *oquea* or *waqet*.

5. Apparently *bazato* or *bezzet*, the Amharic for prepared but unspun cotton.

6. Alvarez, pp. 321, 63.

Describing the handing over of this tribute Alvares declared : 'At the presentation of this *gibre* (*geber*), I saw with my eyes all the gold which came on trays, and they say it was great in quantity and it all came in this manner. The *Betudete* in front, stripped from the waist upwards, and with the crown wound round his head, like the head-gear of a Castilian muleteer, and when within hearing from where he could be heard at the Prester's tent, he said three times, with a very small interval between each cry, '*Aalto*'(?), which in our language is like Sire: and they answered him from within the tent twice in their language, "who are you?" He, in their language, replied, "I who call, am the smallest of your house, and am he who saddles your mules and puts the head stalls on your baggage mules, I serve in what other business you command, I bring you, Sire, what you commanded me". All this was said three times, and when that was done, the voice from inside said, "Pass on, pass forward." And he went on and made his bow before the tent and passed on. Behind him immediately came the horses, one behind the other, each horse had a man or boy at the halter. The foremost thirty were saddled, they were reasonably good, but of the others that followed behind, the best was not worth two drachms (*drams*), and many of them were not worth a drachm; I saw them later given for less, and these would be quite three thousand. After these sorry nags came the mules after the manner of the nags, that is thirty good ones saddled, and all the others small young mules, but better than the nags. These were male and female mules, of a year and over, and two years old and three, and none more than that except the saddled ones; for none of the others were fit for riding. These would be quite three thousand, and they passed by as had done the *Betudete* and the little horses. After the mules came the *basutos*, and each man carried a *basuto*, for he could not carry more from their great volume. After the *basutos* came the cloths, each man with a bundle of them; they said that each man carried ten cloths, and there would be quite three thousand men with the *basutos*, and three thousand with the cloths, and all these were from the said Kingdom of Gojjam, who were obliged to bring the *gibre*. Behind the cloths came three men, each with a trencher on their heads, of those in which they eat: they were covered with large green and red cloths of tafetan (*taffeta*). Behind these trays came

all the men of the *Betudete*, and they passed in turn as did the *Betudete*. They said that the gold went in those trays; and they ordered him to go to his quarters with all the *gibre*, and so he did. Ten days from prime till after vespers were spent in this passing by of the dues.⁷

Some days later, Alvares continues, 'the *Barnagais* began to give his *gibre*, and he began with very handsome horses; they were a hundred and fifty, and what with running and making them jump, he passed the day without doing anything else. The day after they say that he presented many silks and much thin stuffs from India; I did not see him present these, as I was unwell. When this was presented the following day very early, *Tigrimahom* (*Tigre Makonnen* or Prince of Tigre) began to present his *gibre*. He also began with horses, which were two hundred, larger and more handsome than those of the *Barnagais*, because they came from a less distance; and of one set and of the other most came from Egypt, and others from Arabia. This day nothing was done but horses. The next day they presented more silks than ever I had seen together, and the whole day passed in presenting, counting and receiving. On the following Tuesday, at the hour of midday, Balgada Robel, a great gentleman, subject to *Tigrimahom*, came to present his *gibre* separately. It was thirty horses, all from Egypt, the size of elephants, and very fat, each horse with a *Xumagali* (*shimagile*), that is a gentleman without a title, and eight of these *Xumagali* were dressed in some very good cuirasses of ours, and some of them placed on velvet, and others on soft leather and gilt studs. These eight wore some of our helmets on their heads. Balgada Robel was counted among these eight, and the twenty-two all wore coats of mail with full sleeves and fitting close to the body. All the thirty carried two *azagays*⁸ and several knives like Turks: and all had small red caps with large ends, which fluttered in the wind. Before them came two little negroes dressed in red and yellow livery, each upon a camel covered with the same livery, and sounding kettle-drums. As soon as they reached near the tent of the Prester, they set aside the horses at one end and did not cease from their music and the *Xumagalis* skirmishing: they did it in such a way that the Prester ordered other horses to be

7. *ibid.*, pp. 321-3.

8. Spears.

brought of those given by the *Barnagais* and *Tigrimahon*, that they should pay also. This lasted till sunset'.⁹

The Portuguese priest elsewhere refers to the fact that the people called Ballous to the west of Begemder gave the Emperor 'a great number of horses', while the province of Adea (Hadya) paid a 'great number' of cows as tribute, and that he had himself seen them at court.¹⁰ The lordship of Abrigima (Abba Garima?) in Angot was asked on one occasion to provide one hundred and fifty plough oxen, thirty dogs, thirty *assagays* and thirty shields. Thus each province was supposed to supply the produce most readily available to it. 'Those towards Egypt and Arabia pay horses and silks, and the other lands and lordships pay each their own produce according to their quality and breed.'¹¹

Markets were subjected to special taxation. Alvares states that the important trading centre of Manadeley in Tigre paid the Emperor no less than one thousand *oqueas* of gold a year. The local traders, he says, complained at this tax which was not levied on merchants from abroad but only on those who resided in the town.¹² This type of taxation is also referred to by Grañ's chronicler, Arab-Faqih.¹³

Besides the above tribute Alvares also mentions the existence of 'many royal farms' belonging to the Prester which yielded 'a great quantity of bread'. This, he said, was given to 'honourable persons', to the poor and to poor monasteries and churches 'without Prester John making any profit of the produce and revenue of these farms'. Alvares and his compatriots had themselves on two occasions received five hundred loads of grain in this way.¹⁴

Taxes, it should be added, were normally paid indirectly, the smaller chiefs giving their due to superior chiefs who in turn delivered their tribute to the sovereign. The 'great lords', who, Alvares says, were 'like Kings' ate 'at the expense of the people'; they were nonetheless 'all tributaries of Prester John' and took good care to pay him large dues as he removed and appointed them at will; since his lands were so populous his total revenues could not but be large.¹⁵

Bermudes, describing the situation a generation later, during

9. Alvarez, pp. 324-5.

10. *ibid.*, pp. 352, 331.

11. *ibid.*, p. 131.

15. *ibid.*, pp. 54, 93-94. *Vide* also Conzelman, pp. 141, 154.

12. *ibid.*, p. 272.

13. Arab-Faqih, p. 131.

14. Alvarez, p. 406.

the war with Grañ, provides the additional information that the 'heathen' people of Gurage paid the King every year as much 'fine and good' gold as eight men could carry, as well as six buffalo loads of impure silver, one thousand live cows and 'many skins' of lions, leopards and other animals.¹⁶ The chronicle of Sartsa Dengel (1563-1597) notes that the tribute of the Bahrna-gash was composed of large numbers of imported silks and cloth, china ware and excellent horses.¹⁷

The estimates of Alvares are challenged by the Jesuit Almeida, who, paying little attention to the fact that a fall in revenue was only to be expected on account of the long years of warfare, the loss of many provinces and the decline in trade resulting from the Turkish occupation of Massawa, argued that the tribute which his predecessor had seen and the pomp and ceremony which accompanied its arrival, was nothing more than a trick devised by the Ethiopians to impress their visitors.

For his own part he affirmed that the Emperor Susneyos (1607-1632), whom he calls a 'prince of great truthfulness', stated 'many times' that 'none of his predecessors ever had any gold or silver treasure'. All that he had himself seen was stored for the Emperor by the Portuguese and never exceeded one thousand to one thousand five hundred *oqueas* or ten thousand to fifteen thousand *patacas*,¹⁸ each *oquea* of gold being worth ten *drimes* (*drams*),¹⁹ each of which was worth about one *pataca*.

Almeida considered that the revenue which Susneyos received was on the same modest scale. The largest amount of gold came from Enarea, and according to the latter, no emperor (presumably since the time of Grañ) had received as much from there as Sartsa Dengel (1563-1597) who was said to have been given on one occasion five thousand *oqueas*, though many people thought this uncertain; normally, however, the province did not send him more than one thousand five hundred *oqueas* annually, or fifteen thousand *patacas*. Susneyos also had sometimes received that sum in good years, but now seldom obtained more than one thousand *oqueas*. Moreover, the pressure of the Gallas and dissension

16. Whiteway, p. 149.

17. Conti Rossini, *Historia Regis Sarsa Dengel*, p. 46; *vide* also pp. 31, 49, 52, 96, 111, 142, 175, 180-1.

18. An old Castilian silver coin worth a drime of gold. *Vide Some Records of Ethiopia*, p. 44 n.

19. Another corruption of *drachma*.

among the lords of Enarea had led to a further decline in revenue so that not more than five hundred *oqueas* were coming in when the Jesuits were expelled.²⁰

This part of the account is confirmed from other sources. The Jesuit Gaspar Pais says that the province gave a tribute of fifteen thousand *patacas* in 1626, while his namesake Pero Pais, writing of about the same time, notes that it weighed fifteen thousand *cruzados* (a Portuguese coin equivalent to a *pataca*), half as much as previously, and was said to have once equalled fifty thousand *cruzados*.²¹ Bruce states that Sartsa Dengel, desirous of opening up communication with the gold-producing area of Enarea, crossed the Blue Nile, was 'received with great joy' by the Prince of Enarea and was given 'many rich presents, more particularly a large quantity of gold'. Susneyos, he adds, on one occasion received one thousand *oqueas* brought by a caravan which travelled once a year through the country of the Gallas and thence by way of the lands of the Gafats and Gongas. Gregory informed Ludolphus that the ruler of Enarea subsequently came to Fasilidas 'laden with gold'.²²

Gojam also contributed a significant amount of gold, though, according to Pero Pais, it was not of such a fine quality as that of Enarea. Almeida states that certain lands in this province paid one thousand one hundred *oqueas* of gold a year – eleven thousand five hundred *cruzados* according to Pais – but the Emperor usually gave all or most of these lands to his sons and brothers and other lords who therefore consumed this revenue themselves. Pais, who claims that his account was based on information from the Emperor's brother, Ras Seela Kristos, said that Susneyos received no more than one thousand seven hundred *cruzados* in gold. He and Almeida agree that the province also raised three thousand pieces of cloth, each worth a *pataca*, and two hundred *bezetes* (*bazet*), 'large, closely woven cotton cloths' worth one *oquea* a piece. It was said that this kingdom had also formerly provided three thousand horses, though Almeida considered that these must have been mainly nags and jades; the Emperor Sartsa Dengel had excused the people of Gojam from paying this tribute on account of the Galla menace, considering

20. Almeida, pp. 84–6.

21. *Lettere Annue di Ethiopia*, p. 229; Beccari, Vol. II, p. 283.

22. Bruce, Vol. II, pp. 230, 283; Flemming, p. 103.

that his subjects could defend themselves better by retaining their horses.²³ Pero Pais, confirming this statement, adds that Gojam supplied no provisions to the Emperor, and only a small quantity of honey, as little of it was available except in one district which gave five hundred *caloes*, or large earthenware jars, of it every year.²⁴

According to Almeida none of the other kingdoms paid any tribute in gold though many of the governors, as we have seen, gave some to the Emperor in return for their posts. He was thought to obtain in this way nearly twenty-five thousand *patacas* a year from Tigre, five thousand from Dambea, as well as something from Begemder, Amhara, Holeca (Walaqa) and Shoa though these provinces could not afford as much as other places because they had been ravaged by the Gallas. Former emperors, Almeida here admitted, had 'a great advantage' over those of his own time as they had 'many more and much bigger Kingdoms' which had since fallen to the Gallas or had become 'partially independent' as a result of a Galla wedge between them and the emperor's domains.²⁵

Pero Pais, whose data, as we have seen, largely agrees with that of Almeida, gives slightly more details concerning the tribute from the ruler of Tigre and some of its provinces. Confirming that the yield from Tigre was ordinarily about twenty-five thousand six hundred *cruzados* – which corresponds almost exactly to the twenty-five thousand *patacas* mentioned by Almeida – he states that the contribution of the various districts was as follows:

<i>District</i>	<i>Tribute in cruzados</i>
Tigre (the governor?)	5,000 (or a little less)
Bahrnagash, country of	5,000
Serae	4,000
Tembien	4,000
Abargale	3,000
Sahart	1,000
Amba Sanayt	2,000
Enderta	300
Agame	1,000
Zama	300

23. Almeida, p. 86; Beccari, Vol. II, p. 284. For an account of the Galla invasion of Gojam at this time *vide* Conti Rossini, *Historia Sarsa Dengel*, p. 134. *Vide* also Beccari, Vol. VIII, p. 47; Vol. XI, p. 132.

24. Beccari, Vol. II, p. 284.

25. Almeida, pp. 86–7.

He estimated that Begemder gave four thousand *cruzados* worth of gold and that one thousand *cruzados* came from the districts of Dambea, Sagade, Bed, Cola and Alafa respectively.²⁶

A somewhat different series of estimates for a number of northern districts, which has no claim to be complete, is provided for this period by Barradas who gives his figures in *oqueas*, i.e. the equivalent of ten *cruzados*.²⁷

<i>District</i>	<i>Tribute in oqueas</i>
Tigre (the governor?)	300
Bahrnagash, country of	200
Serae	150
Salicit	60
Zama	40
Shire	200 (maximum)
Tembien	200
Gralta	40
Sahart	130
Wajarat	140
Enderta	140
Land belonging to the Abuna	40
Sera, belonging to the Queen	30
Senafe	30
Agame	120
Amba Sanayt	70
Bur (greater)	30
Aksum	40

An immense amount of tribute was of course paid in kind. Thus Pais mentions payment in cloth, cotton, honey, butter and horses, the exact amount to be paid by each area being clearly determined and fixed. He says that the Bahrnagash, for example, supplied forty horses of much better quality than those of Gojam,²⁸ while Almeida tells us that the island of Dek on Lake Tana regularly sent three hundred *caloes* of honey.²⁹

In addition to the above tribute Almeida mentions a number of forms of taxation which were also important. There was an agricultural tax which was payable in kind and amounted to a load of produce per man; it was paid by the farmers of Dambea – the province in which the court was situated – as well as those

26. Beccari, Vol. II, pp. 283–4.

27. *ibid.*, Vol. IV, pp. 82, 84–5.

28. *ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 284–5.

29. Almeida, p. 35.

of Gojam, Begemder and several other provinces. Most of this produce did not reach the Emperor, but was allotted to various lords. Dambea, for example, yielded ten thousand or twelve thousand loads of produce, some of which was divided among soldiers who had not been presented with lands, some was used as alms for the poor, and some given to the lords and ladies at court.

A cattle tax had been imposed less than eighty years before his visit, that is to say since the time of Alvares, by which owners of cows had to pay tribute of one animal in ten every three years. Since the country had many cattle, mostly of the horned variety, Almeida thought that this tax was very valuable for the Emperor, who had organized his provinces so that every year there were some who paid this tribute. It was called 'burning', because the cows chosen for the Emperor were branded with fire: Almeida declares that the word 'burning' also suited the action of the men who collected the tribute and received most of the cows. They were usually soldiers who stood no nonsense in the way of non-payment.³⁰ Pais and Barradas, who also refer to this tax in almost identical terms, both attempt to estimate its yield. Pais says that Gojam supplied 12,000 head of cattle, Holeca 5,000, Damot 2,000, Amhara 2,000, Begemder 6,000, Dara 5,000, Tigre 5,900 and Segarde and Walqayt 3,000.³¹ Barradas says that Tigre gave no less than 30,000 head at every 'burning' though this would have been very substantially greater were it not for unfaithful collectors from whom no emperor was free.³²

Weavers, too, were taxed; if Christian they were each obliged to give one piece of cotton cloth a year, and if Muslim one *drime* or *pataca*. This tax, according to Almeida, yielded 'many thousands' of pieces of cloth in Dambea and neighbouring districts, though most of these dues were given to the various nobles who administered those particular lands.³³

Taxes were also levied on internal and external trade, both at the numerous markets and at a series of customs posts all over the country. Pais states that at each customs post the traders were obliged to surrender one-tenth of all imported goods; the tax on local produce, on the other hand, was much less, but yielded a substantial revenue as there was much commerce in

30. *ibid.*, pp. 87-8.

31. Beccari, Vol. II, p. 286.

32. *ibid.*, Vol. IV, p. 185.

33. Almeida, p. 88.

slaves, ivory, salt, wax and other goods.³⁴ According to Almeida most customs posts did not yield their taxes directly to the Emperor, but to the various nobles to whom he had given the lands in which they were situated. He had, however, retained for his own use the customs post at Lamalmon³⁵ which yielded the equivalent in kind of one hundred *oqueas* a year.³⁶

Such customs posts, it may be added, were to be found on main trade routes and were of considerable significance. At a mountain which he calls Dagusa, for example, Almeida mentions coming upon a 'sizable village' consisting almost entirely of market women and found that dues were collected both on salt from Tigre and on cloth and other merchandize from Massawa. Caravans, he added, remained there for at least one day and sometimes for many, with the result that the producers of *siwa* (beer)³⁷ and others did a good trade.³⁸

Apart from his revenue in taxes Almeida confirms that the Emperor also received produce from crown lands which yielded ten thousand to twelve thousand loads of provisions.³⁹

'These', Almeida concludes, 'are the revenues of the Ethiopian Empire. When they are added up it is easy to see that the total amount is quite small, not only in comparison with what is currently reported in the world, but in comparison with what one would expect from so many kingdoms and territories. However, besides what we said, that in a poor country it amounts to more than would be supposed elsewhere, what chiefly makes this King great is that he is lord *in solidum* of all lands that there are in his kingdoms, so that he can take and give them when and to whom he sees fit. Private persons, great and small, have nothing except by the King's gift and all that they own is by favour *ad tempus*.⁴⁰

Ludolphus also was anxious to avoid overrating the wealth of the far-off land of Prester John. Discussing the Emperor's treasure, which had been exaggerated by European writers of the Middle Ages, he declares: 'As for the Revenues of the King,

34. Beccari, Vol. II, pp. 285-6.

35. Lamalmon is in the western extension of the Semien range and is now better known as Walkefit.

36. Almeida, p. 87. *Vide* also Beccari, Vol. I, p. 151.

37. Tigrinya *siwa* or Amharic *talla*, Ethiopian beer.

38. Almeida, p. 41.

39. *ibid.*, p. 87. *Vide* also Beccari, Vol. II, p. 286.

40. Almeida, pp. 88-9.

they are not paid in money, but in the natural Productions of the Countries, the most equal sort of Tribute. For some Provinces afford Gold, others Horses, Cattle, Sheep, Corn and Ox Hides, and some few, where Weavers live, send him Garments. They bring their Gold rough and unrefin'd, as they gather it up among the Sands of the Rivers, or digg it out under the Roots of Trees, or else with less Labour find it loose upon the earth.'⁴¹

More or less accepting the above presented estimates, which had presumably met with Gregory's approval, Ludolphus remarked that though the Emperor's revenues were small when compared with the extent of the empire, it was necessary to observe that the prices of all things were very low; a huge ox, for example, could be bought for half a dollar and servants were paid in kind and not in money. Considering this great abundance and cheapness of all supplies, he concluded: 'The Abissine Emperour has enough and to spare: not that his Diadem glitters with Gemms or Pearls, or that his Treasuries are full of money; or that his Cupboards shine with Silver and Gold Plate, or that his Table is spread with Forraign Banquets while his subjects are in want – his Courtiers poor, and his Souldiers under penury. But he has that which suffices to afford him moderate Dyet, and slender Cloathing. Then for his Souldiers and his Warlike Subjects, that is to say, his poor People, they, detain'd at home by no delicacies, are ready still to gird on their Swords. Which they who dexterously and courageously know how to wield in a good Cause, need never want Gold nor Silver, nor whatever Mortals esteem precious and desirable.'⁴²

The interest of the Emperor Iyasu I (1682–1706) in matters of trade and taxation is revealed by the chronicle of his reign which indicates that in 1698 he summoned all the nobles and officials from Enderta to Wagara, and called upon them to explain their system of tax collecting. He learnt that during the reigns of his predecessors, Susneyos and Fasiladas, the regulations were that at all the large customs posts there was a duty of one salt bar on every donkey-load of salt, and of two bars on every mule-load; porters who carried salt on their shoulders were exempt from payment and there were no charges except at the main posts. It transpired, however, that in the course of time

41. Ludolphus, p. 205. *Vide* also Lobo, pp. 256–7.

42. Ludolphus, p. 206.

much extortion had developed and that the inhabitants of Tigre were stealing considerable amounts of salt from the merchants on the pretext of collecting dues in many small villages which were not really customs posts. After discussing the matter with the governors the Emperor decided that there should be only one customs post for each area, and that the tax should be reduced to one salt bar on every five mule- or eight donkey-loads of salt. It was proclaimed that anyone attempting to collect taxes on persons carrying salt on their shoulders should be sentenced to death and have his goods confiscated. The Emperor at the same time abolished many old customs posts and ordered others to be established.⁴³ He also commanded that these decisions should be registered in the Book of Annals and in the register of his chief steward, and that a herald should proclaim the news throughout the land.⁴⁴

Bruce, who was obliged to pay taxes at a number of these customs posts, called them *Awides*, or gifts, and notes that in his day the dues were levied 'for the most part in a very rigorous and rude manner'. These dues were payable 'by usage in particular spots' called *bar*,⁴⁵ or passes, a word which was met with in such place-names as Dingleber and Sankraber.⁴⁶ Describing the journey from Massawa to Adowa, a distance of only about two hundred kilometres as the crow flies, he tells of no fewer than five customs posts: at Samhar, Digsä, Darghat, Balez and

43. According to the Chronicle customs had to be paid at the following places: In the district of Gralta at the customs posts of Magab and Mata; in Tambien at Sada Hamad and Bazbaz; in Sahart at Macure; in Abargale at Abba Gebc, Barbaz and Barlaqo; in Tsalamt at Zando Bar; in Aquino at Maygasa (or Maygala); in Sabrana at Manta Bar and Meslal. For the country of the Muslims and Falashas at the passage of Selqi; at Abara (instead of Saganat where the customs post was abolished) in Ataba at Feyel Waha (instead of at Afo) at Sabatan; for the country of Warab at Samre; at Tagula, Serado and Densit; at Mambarta and Ennagale. Customs posts were abolished at the following places: Saganat; Afo; Gebana and Baranta; in the district of Mambarta at Hayq Masal; in Dara at Agula; in Enderta at Shafta and Weshafat; at Sugala; at Gambala, Wagr Haliba and Gebana in the country of Ras Fares; in Tambien at Chama, Taget, Balas, Sade, Gazawa, May Halaqt, Dorho Qot, Erbaha, Erbabeca, Chanqua; in Abargale at Aquasare, Shendi Bero, Chelqua, Beta Masqal, Degla (or Degsa) Taquana, Mual Hamus, and Gegeqe; in Tsalemt at Aquana, Sabra and Saganat; in Eslam Bar at Aro, Gebana and Tagula; in Sara at Agula and Sefeh (or Lafeh); in Mambarta at Hayq Masal. Market dues were abolished in Gralta.

44. Guidi, *Annales Iohannes I, Iyasu I et Bakaffa*, pp. 206-7.

45. Gate, in Amharic.

46. Bruce, Vol. III, pp. 104-5.

Kella.⁴⁷ Farther inland he was requested to pay customs at Addergey and later at Lamalmon, through which place all Gondar caravans had to pass.⁴⁸ At most of these places, the tax-gatherers had farmed out the *Awide* for a profit. The tax, he said, was 'much of the same nature as the *caphtar* in the Levant, but levied in a much more indiscreet, arbitrary manner. The farmer of this duty values as he thinks proper what each caravan is to pay; there is no tariff, or restraint, upon him. Some have on this account been detained for months; and others, in time of trouble or bad news, have been robbed of everything: this is always the case upon the least resistance; for then the villages around you rise up in arms; you are not only stripped of your property, but sure to be ill-treated in your person'.⁴⁹

With the decline of the central authority state revenue appears to have dwindled further. The chronicle of Iyoas declared that on the death of Iyasu II in 1755 there were no more than 80 *dinars* of gold in the royal treasury.⁵⁰ Bruce's *Travels* and notebooks referring to the situation a generation later contain estimates which contrast somewhat unfavourably with those of the Portuguese writers. According to his data, which, however, do not seem comprehensive, Agao Meder paid the Emperor every year about 1,000 *oqueas*, or ounces, of gold, 1,000 *dabras* of honey, each *dabra* containing about 60 *rotols*,⁵¹ and about 1,500 cattle. It had formerly paid 4,000 *dabras* of honey, but this amount had been greatly diminished as many lands had since been allocated to private persons to whom the tribute had been diverted. Besides what it paid to the sovereign the region gave tribute to the governor of Damot and to the official responsible for its tax collection whose post was worth a further 1,000 *oqueas* of gold. Damot, which had formerly supplied 1,000 *oqueas* of gold now provided 800 *oqueas* and 120 jars of honey. Gojam yielded no more than 80 *oqueas* of gold and a mere 70 mules, while Guesgue gave 100 *oqueas* of gold, 1,000 pieces of cloth and 30 or 50 oxen. Lasta had been obliged by Iyasu I (1682-1706) to pay a tribute of 1,000 *oqueas* of gold, a levy which continued to be collected until the time of Ras Mikael when the province

47. *Kella*, the Amharic for a customs post.

48. *ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 170-6, 185.

49. *ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 105.

50. Guidi, *Annales Regum Iyasu II et Iyoas*, p. 182.

51. Approximately one pound avoirdupois.

became independent. Tigre's contribution was now worth 400 *oqueas*, and was made up mainly of salt and cotton cloth, while Walqayt also provided 1,000 cotton cloths to the value of 1,500 *oqueas*. Maitsha paid 2,000 *oqueas* of gold to the Bitwaded, the chief man of state, and a further 600 ounces to its *Ajaz* or governor. The smaller provinces paid proportionately, in the produce of their region. Thus Ancasha, Azena and Quaquera gave honey; Metchakel, and Zigam, gold; Banja, honey and gold; Dengla – a part of Ancasha – chiefly cattle and a large kind of sheep called Macoot. Butter was no part of the tribute, but was often brought as an additional offering.⁵² Cultivators were also often obliged to pay the sovereign an agricultural tax, which Bruce rates at 10 per cent.⁵³

There is remarkably little documentation available on the payments made by the villeins to their lords before the nineteenth century. Pais says that in the early seventeenth century these usually took the form of a portion of the crop, or, in some areas, a certain amount of cloth, as well as a pot of honey and a fowl at Easter and Masqal, the feast of the cross. The villeins, it appears, were generally supposed to hand over a third of their produce, but Pais suggests that in the preceding century they had begun to hide a considerable proportion of the harvest. Sartsa Dengel (1563–1597) had therefore appointed a commission composed of a judge, a landlord and two or three other persons, to decide the amount of produce to be given by each villein. The commission estimated that the third had by then shrunk to something more like a fifth of the crop.⁵⁴

A century and a half later Bruce stated that the tenants in Tigre usually surrendered at least half their crop, the landlord however, supplying the seed. It was, he adds, 'a very indulgent master that does not take another quarter for the risk he has run; so that the quantity that comes to the share of the husbandman is not more than sufficient to afford sustenance for his wretched family'.⁵⁵ In Adowa, for example, the governor took half the

52. Bruce, Vol. II, p. 618; Vol. III, pp. 739–40; Vol. IV, pp. 24, 245; 3rd ed., Vol. VII, pp. 75, 90, 94–5. *Vide* also Guidi, *Annales Iohannis I, Iyasu I et Bakaffa*, pp. 145, 164; *idem*, *Annales Regum Iyasu II et Iyoas*, pp. 114, 117, 141, 151, 156, 194, 214, 216–18, 220, 227, 232–3, 263; Blundell, pp. 38, 51.

53. Bruce, Vol. VII, p. 77.

54. Beccari, Vol. II, p. 285; *vide* also Vol. II, pp. 187–8.

55. Bruce, 1st ed., Vol. III, p. 124.

crop, marking out the land which was to yield his share at sowing time, and subsequently taking an additional quarter after the harvest.⁵⁶

56. *ibid.*, 3rd ed., Vol. IV, p. 316 n.

Chapter 11

Church Property in Land

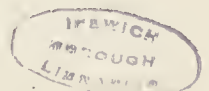
THE CHURCH, the largest landowner after the emperor, also received taxes, or tithes, on the lands it possessed. Such lands were often given by the emperor, or very occasionally by the empress, to particular churches or monasteries whose officials recorded in their archives such details as the location and extent of the land and, sometimes, the tithe it supplied. Though these documents have not thus far been studied exhaustively, information on the gifts by successive rulers to the cathedral of St. Mary of Sion at Aksum and to the famous monastery of Bizen, has been published by the Italian scholar Conti Rossini,¹ and there are occasional references to gifts of land and tithes in some of the chronicles.² Many of the churches and monasteries were very wealthy, as we shall see, and possessed large numbers of costly brocades, velvets from Mecca, huge silver crosses and other riches presented by great patrons, as well as substantial revenues.³

Alvares makes occasional reference to church lands. Describing his visit to the town of Caina(?) in the country of the Bahrnagash, he states that it belonged to the famous monastery of Bizen five days' journey away. 'Besides that town,' he adds, 'there were a hundred villages all belonging to the monastery. . . . We were also shown many of the others, and they told us that every three years they paid a horse to the monastery, and that each village did this, which makes thirty-three horses every year.' In order to be certain of these facts he inquired of the *Alaqa* [i.e. the head] of the monastery who told him that the payment of horses had been fixed by the Emperor to whom the villages had formerly belonged, but that he had given the right to receive them to the church, since when the villagers had had to pay fifty cows for

1. *Vide* Conti Rossini, *Donazioni reali alla cattedrale di Aksum*; *idem*, *Il Gadla Filpos et il Gadla Yohannes di Dabra Bizan*; *idem*, *Liber Axumae*.

2. Blundell, pp. 301, 449-50.

3. Alvarez, p. 33; Perruchon, *Les Chroniques de Zara Yaeqob et de Baeda Maryam*, pp. 50, 53-4, 68, 72, 91-3, 169-70, 179, 181; Perruchon, *Histoire des Guerres d'Amda Syon*, p. 483.



every horse. They also paid dues in fruit. Fifteen days' journey to the south, in the kingdom of Tigre, there was another 'very large town' belonging to the monastery of Aadete(?), which paid each year sixty horses, and 'an infinite number of dues and customs'. In this district there were always 'more than a thousand friars'.⁴

The above account of Alvares must be read in conjunction with the contradictory statement by the author of the *Carta das novas*, who declares, at about the same time, that the friars in the region of Bizen had told him that tithes in much of the neighbouring country was collected by the Bahrnagash 'though they well knew that God had commanded them to be given to the Church'.⁵

Both authors agree, however, that the clergy supported themselves by their own labour, a point which had already been made to Zorzi by the Franciscan, Brother Thomas, who said that Ethiopian monks and priests undertook manual labour 'like donkeys'.⁶ Alvares states that the monks of Bizen had two sources of millet: that which they produced by their own labour, and that supplied to them by farmers cultivating church land.⁷ Describing the monastery of Yekuno Amlak in Angot, he relates: 'friars and nuns dig and prune in this country, and they sow wheat and barley, which they eat, for the monastery gives them little'.⁸ The author of the *Carta* confirms that the friars of Bizen lived by the sweat of their brow and the labour of their hands. They told him that they had maize fields in the neighbouring mountains and bred many mules which they sold for their maintenance; as for alms they had 'little or nothing'. To substantiate these statements they displayed the tools they used which he considered 'rather poor'. However, they were hospitable to the strangers from Portugal with whom they shared their frugal supper of wheat and barley, bread, honey, onions, and wine (which was presumably *taj*, or mead, for the author of the *Carta* says, it was 'not made from grapes').⁹ Bruce writing two and a half centuries later of the Gondar area says that while the monks cultivated a part of their property the priests had their maintenance assigned to them in kind and did not labour on the land.

4. Alvarez, pp. 46-7.

5. *The Discovery of Abyssinia*, p. 79.

6. *Ethiopian Itineraries*, p. 169.

7. Alvarez, p. 16.

8. *ibid.*, p. 118.

9. *The Discovery of Abyssinia*, p. 80.

They were provided for by a lay steward appointed by the sovereign who was responsible for the collection of all rents belonging to the Church.¹⁰

The ecclesiastics, it should be emphasized, had many expenses apart from their own personal consumption: these included the maintenance and repair of ecclesiastical buildings, the upkeep of aged retired clergy, scribes and indigent persons, and the distribution of alms to the poor.¹¹ Charity seems also to have been dispensed by various *mahabars*, or societies of citizens, who then, as in later centuries, held monthly feasts in honour of one or other of the numerous saints. The clergy, as Alvares states, were given their share of such meals which took place almost daily;¹² though he does not say so it may be assumed in the light of tradition and the evidence of later times, that the poor were also fed on these occasions, the *mahabar* being in fact a significant institution of social welfare.¹³

The wealth of the Church was also discussed by the Jesuit observers of the seventeenth century. Almeida says that the Abuna, who came from Egypt, held three or four large estates as *gult*, in other words according to a system of land tenure which allowed him the tribute normally paid to the Emperor. His lands in Tigre were said to yield forty to fifty *oqueas* of gold a year, i.e. four hundred to five hundred *patacas*, while those in Dambea supplied him with sufficient provisions for the upkeep of his household. Further lands in Gojam, on the other hand, were of little value to him as they were near to the Blue Nile and subject to frequent attacks by the Gallas. Those of the Abuna's tenants who were exempted from labour service were expected to pay one or two bars of salt a year, a charge which, Almeida says, gave the Egyptian ecclesiastic a revenue of many thousand pieces.¹⁴ The more important religious establishments were also abundantly supplied with land. Thus Barradas states that the monastery of Bizen had large and good lands, not only in its vicinity but also as far away at Shire, while the monastery of Abba Garima near Adowa possessed many excellent lands, if anything larger than those in the Portuguese province of Alentejo;

10. Bruce, 1st ed., Vol. III, p. 319.

11. Alvarez, p. 35.

12. *ibid.*, pp. 85-6.

13. For a modern account *vide* Pankhurst and Endreas Eshete, *passim*.

14. Beccari, Vol. VI, pp. 161-2. *Vide* also Bruce, Vol. II, p. 477.

some were *gult* and gave the whole of their revenues to the monks while others paid half to the governor of Tigre. The emperors of former times, he added, had been as generous in giving lands to the Church as those of his day were anxious to get some of them back to meet the needs of their soldiers whom they wished to satisfy.

A certain limitation of Church land which may have had political implications, appears to have taken place during the reign of Susneyos (1607-1632). Barradas tells us that this Emperor in his efforts to introduce the Roman Catholic faith seized a major part of the lands belonging to the monastery of Bizen which did not obtain them back even after the re-establishment of the ancient faith. Once Church lands had been seized by the chiefs and soldiers, he comments, it was very difficult for the old owners to get them back.¹⁵

Grants of land to religious establishments, were, none the less, normally considered permanent, and most Church land had been obtained in this way from successive emperors. The most extensive Church holdings were in provinces such as Shoa and southern Tigre which had at one time or another been within reach of the royal camp. In Bruce's day, however, the Church's possessions in Tigre had been reduced by Ras Mikael with the result that the Abuna, who had once received four hundred ounces of gold from them, obtained only twenty-five ounces, one-third of which went to one of the sovereign's officers who resided in the prelate's house. Expropriation resulted from a royal decree issued in Gondar by Ras Mikael's wish in 1771. According to Bruce it ordered 'that all lands and villages, which are now or have been given to the Abuna by the King, shall revert to the King's own use, and be subject to the government, or the Cantiba (Kantiba) of Dambea, or such officers as the King shall after appoint in the provinces where they are situated'. It was, moreover, the royal privilege to appoint the *Alaqas*, the officials responsible for the administration of churches and other religious establishments. These officials divided the institution's wealth among its various monks or priests and were empowered to use any surplus for other purposes. The Church held little or no property in the south and in other areas under Galla occupation.¹⁶

15. Beccari, Vol. IV, pp. 243, 268. *Vide* also p. 234.

16. Bruce, Vol. II, p. 356; Vol. III, p. 114; Vol. IV, p. 78; 3rd ed., Vol. III, p. 17; Vol. VII, p. 87. *Vide* also Blundell, pp. 301, 450.

Chapter 12

Church Schools

IT IS SURPRISING that as a priest Alvares should have devoted little attention to the Church schools of Ethiopia, which were the only source of education. He declares that 'the sons of priests are for the most part priests, because in this country there are no studies (i.e. in schools unconnected with a church), and the clergy teach what little they know to their sons'. On asking why there were so many canons at a church he visited in Angot he was told by a *dabtara*¹ that 'all the sons of canons, and as many as descended from them, remained canons, and the fathers each taught their sons, and so they had increased in number, and that this happened (also) in the King's churches, and that frequently Prester John diminished them, when he set up a church in a new country, and sent to fetch canons from these churches'.²

Graduates of ecclesiastical schools perforce constituted the entire literate class. 'All Ethiopian letters, tracts and poems,' wrote Gregory to Ludolphus on 16 October 1650, 'are works conceived in the style of books . . . not everyone in our country knows how to write them, only the teachers and scribes, that is to say the men of letters.'³ Written communications were, however, infrequent. 'In this country', states Alvares, 'they are not accustomed to write to one another, neither do the officers of justice write anything. All the justice that is done, and what is ordered, is by messengers and speech.'⁴

1. The *dabtaras* are lay clerics who are often learned doctors and teachers of the Church, scholars, musicians and poets.

2. Alvarez, pp. 63, 57, 139-40.

3. Flemming, pp. 86-7.

4. Alvarez, p. 408.

Chapter 13

Agriculture

THE WEALTH of Ethiopia's agriculture was already legendary in Europe before eye-witness accounts became available to the reading public. In the thirteenth century, for example, Marco Polo declared that the produce of the realm included rice(?),¹ wheat, flesh, milk and sesame and that the country abounded in 'all the necessaries of life'.²

As early as the fourteenth century the Egyptian, Ibn Fadl Allah, who refers to the cultivation in Ethiopia of wheat and barley, sorghum and *tef*,³ chick-peas⁴ and lentils, pointed to one of the most significant aspects of the country's agriculture when he observed that two harvests could be obtained every year,⁵ a statement which Brother Raphael repeated to Zorzi some hundred and fifty years later.⁶ Alvares, writing at about the same period, remarked that sowing took place throughout the year with the result that all stages of cultivation – sowing, weeding, reaping and threshing – could be seen simultaneously.⁷ 'Generally speaking', Almeida confirmed, 'this country is very fertile, for in some parts it yields two or three crops a year, though the energy and effort the farmers put into cultivating is not great.'⁸

Agriculture among the Tigre and Amhara peoples was based on the plough, the use of which was their particular contribution to the economic life of this part of Africa. Ploughing, as may be observed in a contemporary drawing reproduced in the present volume, was carried out with the aid of oxen who were also used for treading the corn. Ploughs were made of rough wood, usually with iron ploughshares.⁹

1. It is very doubtful whether rice was in fact grown in Ethiopia.

2. Marco Polo, pp. 251–2.

3. *Eragrostis abyssinica*, *eragrostis tef* or *poa abyssinica*. Vide Bruce, 1st ed., Vol. V, pp. 76–80.

4. In Amharic *shimbra*, *cicer arietinum*.

5. Gaudefroy-Demombynes, pp. 9–12, 26–8.

6. *Ethiopian Itineraries*, pp. 141–3.

7. Alvares, pp. 101–2.

8. Almeida, p. 45.

9. Bruce, Vol. III, p. 115, 561.

Bruce, writing at the end of the eighteenth century, relates that on his journey to Adowa he discovered that the rivulet of Ribieraini was made to overflow the neighbouring plain, thus ensuring not only 'a perpetual store of grass' but also two or three harvests a year. 'Provided there is water', he adds, 'they sow in Abyssinia in all seasons.'¹⁰ Thus in the 'very fertile province' of Wagara there was seed-time, harvest and ploughing 'in every month of the year, water being easily diverted to the grounds'.¹¹ In Adowa, and all the neighbourhood they had three harvests a year. 'Their first seed-time', he says, 'is in July and August; it is the principal one for wheat which they then sow in the middle of the rains. In the same season they sow *tocusso* (*dagusa*), *teff* and barley. From the 20th of November they reap first their barley, then their wheat, and last of all their *teff*. In room of these they sow immediately upon the same ground, without any manure, barley which they reap in February; and then often sow *teff*, but more frequently a kind of veitch, or pea, called *shimbra* (chick-pea); these are cut down before the first rains which are in April.'¹² Such crops presented a rich appearance to the visitor. The top of the Taranta mountain at the northern edge of the plateau, for example, had in many places been sown with wheat and was ready for harvesting when Bruce saw it towards the end of November: he describes it as 'clean and of good colour, but inferior in size to that of Egypt'.¹³

Almeida was the first to emphasize that variations of altitude greatly influenced climate and hence the selection of crops. 'The Abyssinians', he observes, 'distinguish between five types of country to which they give these names: *Choque*(?),¹⁴ *Dega*, *Oinadega* (*wayna daga*), *Colla* (*qolla*) and *Baraqha* (*baraha*).¹⁵ *Choque*, he said, was high and extremely cold country, *Dega*, high and perpetually cold country, *Oinadega*, high but temperate lands without excess of cold or heat, *Colla*, hot lowlands, and *Baraqha* extremely hot desert, as was found for example in

10. *ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 112.

11. *ibid.*, 3rd ed., Vol. VII, p. 77.

12. *ibid.*, 1st ed., Vol. III, p. 124. For a slightly different cycle, *vide* 3rd ed., Vol. VII, p. 77.

13. *ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 83.

14. Beckingham and Huntingford believe this name arises from a misunderstanding of the name Choqe applied to the highest part of the Mangestu mountains in central Gojam, Almeida, pp. 20-21 n.

15. *Baraha* is strictly speaking uninhabited land or desert.

Serae near the Mareb, or along the banks of the Blue Nile.¹⁶

The writings of these and other foreign observers, as well as the testimony of Zorzi's Ethiopian informants, provide a chorus of praise for Ethiopian agriculture which continued throughout the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The abundance of their country's crops was made apparent to Zorzi. Brother Thomas, of Angot, describing the great fertility of the land, states that foodstuffs were so plentiful as to be almost without value and were consequently given freely to agricultural labourers.¹⁷ Brother Raphael, related that the 'great city' of Aksum was surrounded by an area of excellent cultivation, the crops grown there including corn, beans, peas, chick-peas and herbs.¹⁸

The Portuguese, on visiting the country, were astonished by the productivity of its soil and by the wide variety and abundance of its crops. The author of the *Carta das novas*, for example, tells with joy how, after passing through uninhabited lands near Massawa, he came to the fertile plateau area. At the monastery of Bizen he saw beautifully cultivated fields, newly cut corn and numerous threshing floors with heaps of grain, as well as vegetables of various kinds.¹⁹

The account of Alvares tells the same story. Near Debaroa he was delighted to see tilled fields of wheat, barley, millet, pulse (chick-peas?), lentils and 'all sorts of vegetables which the country possesses unknown to us'.²⁰ Reference is made in Ramusio's text to *taffo* (*tef*), *guza* (probably *dagusa*²¹ or finger millet) and maize(?).²² 'This *taffo*', it states, 'is a very good and delicate crop of theirs. It is highly esteemed because maggots that eat wheat and other vegetables do not eat it and it keeps a fairly long

16. Almeida, p. 20.

17. *Ethiopian Itineraries*, p. 169.

18. *ibid.*, pp. 141-3.

19. *The Discovery of Abyssinia*, pp. 75-8.

20. Alvarez, p. 44.

21. *Eleusine coracana*.

22. *Vide* note 1 on p. 137, Dr. C. F. Beckingham, in a letter to the present author, writes: 'The references to maize, *milho zaburro* in Portuguese, raise a problem. So far as I can discover the received opinion is that *Zeá mais* is a New World plant which was first brought to Europe by Columbus on his first voyage, and that it "was taken to Africa and Asia by the Portuguese". If so, what Alvares actually saw growing in Ethiopia can hardly have been maize, and was presumably sorghum. Whether he meant maize by what he said is another question. In Italian by the middle of the sixteenth century the word meant maize,

which is illustrated in an early edition of Ramusio, but some authorities consider that its first occurrence in Portuguese (c. 1502, I think) refers to sorghum.'

Dr. Edgar Anderson, the Curator of Useful Plants at the Missouri Botanical Garden, U.S.A., who conducted research in 1957 in the Jimma, Gambela, Bishoftu and Dire Dawa areas of Ethiopia, writes in a letter to the present author as follows:

'With regard to maize and sorghum, it will take careful collections through Central Africa before we will know the complete story of maize in Africa. It is certain that it is post-Columbian around the coast, and it is certain that these post-Columbian kinds penetrated into new regions at a later date. However, because they are cultivated plants, they have been very little collected and we do not yet have much information on them. All the maize which I saw in Jimma and nearby was a typical white Mexican Dent with some mixture of yellow and coloured grains. It was in every way exactly like some of the Dent mixtures which I have studied in Mexico myself.

'During the short time I was in Gambela I saw some yellow corn (maize) which is of another sort, but all that I was able to study carefully had been crossed with the Mexican maize which had come in there more recently. At Jimma and elsewhere I was told of an older variety of maize ordinarily yellow with smaller kernels, smaller ears, and with several ears to the stalk. I have as yet no information as to how the Mexican maize got to Jimma or as to how large an area it covers except that I did see it over a considerable area there.

'With regard to sorghum, we have a very different picture. The sorghum seems to go by ethnic areas and there is always a change in the sorghum type when one goes out of one ethnic area into another. This is very striking when you take the black top road from Addis Ababa to Jimma. As soon as you approach the first Gurage *tukul* there is a slight change in the type. There are short Kaffir-cornlike sorghum tassels in among the other types. These continue through the Gurage country up to the very last *tukul*, but when one goes down to the river and comes up again on the far side the short Kaffir-like types are no longer in with the other corns. The sorghum of the Jimma-Galla area varies a good deal from plant to plant, but on the whole the fields are very similar. All the fields vary in the extent to which the upper branches of the tassel are condensed into a terminal plume. This is a characteristic which probably comes in eventually from Kaffir corn. Variation of this sort with more or less of a terminal plume showed clearly in all the fields I saw. Some of the fields showed ancient or recent mixture with the heavy-headed sort such as Durra. This is one of the big seeded sorghums with the seed packed tightly together in a big ball.

'Here and there in the Jimma area Durra sorghum has been introduced fairly recently and one saw obvious crosses with it of almost pure types of Durra. Most of the sorghum, however, that I saw in the Galla area was an open-headed sort which long ago, in every field that I saw, had had a small amount of Durra mixed into it. This meant that it was still an open-headed kind of sorghum, but that the lower branches were shortened and heavier and more heavily loaded with seed and with somewhat larger seeds than a pure open-headed sort would have. Near Harar the sorghum was of a totally different sort. Nearly all of it was a heavy-headed sort such as Durra and I did not see the open seeded types. I suspect that there are probably as many sorghum patterns in Ethiopia as there are major ethnic areas. Sorghum certainly originated, at least in part, in Africa, and it is possible that all of the cultivated sorghums stem back to Africa though there are wild sorghums in Indonesia and India and sorghums have been in that part of the world for a very long time.'

time.²³ Alvares was amazed by the extent of cultivation in the Maïcada (Mai Tzada) region of Tigre. 'It seems to me' he declared, 'that in the world there is not so populous a country or one so abundant in crops'.²⁴ Near the town of Abafazem(?), in Tigre, he describes 'very pretty fields, all irrigated by conduits of water descending from the highest peaks, artificially made with stone'. He adds that the crops grown included 'wheat, barley, beans, pulse (chick-peas?), peas, garlic, onions, garden rue, much mustard, and in the water conduits many good water-cresses'.²⁵ The town of Maluche(?) was 'surrounded by very beautiful tilled fields of wheat, barley and millet, the best we had seen yet'.²⁶ At Corcora (Qorqora) he mentions well cultivated wheat and barley, and, around the church, large irrigated fields of wheat, barley, millet, grain, lentils, peas, beans, *tef*, *dagusa*, and many other vegetables.²⁷ In the Farso area (near Mai Chew according to Crawford) he writes of 'thick maize fields' as high as large cane,²⁸ as well as of many plots of coriander. The inhabitants of Farso said 'they had gathered so much crops of all kinds, that if it were not for the worm, there would have been abundance for ten years. And because I was amazed, they said to me: "Honoured guest, do not be amazed, because in the years that we harvest little we gather enough for three years' plenty in the country; and if it were not for the multitude of locusts and hail, which sometimes do great damage, we should not sow the half of what we sow because so much remains that it cannot be believed; so it is sowing wheat, or barley, lentils, pulse or any other seed. We sow so much with the hope that even if each of those said plagues should come, some would be spoiled but some would remain, and if all was spoiled the year before (our produce) is in such manner abundant that we have no scarcity"'.²⁹

On reaching the mountainous country of Angot, Alvares reports that the high ground was mainly cultivated with barley, while wheat flourished in the valleys.³⁰ In the densely populated country beyond this province he saw large tilled fields with crops of all kinds,³¹ while at Acel (probably Wasal, equidistant between Dessie and Lake Haiq) he describes many fields of millet, wheat

23. This statement is confirmed by Ethiopian farmers today.

24. Alvarez, pp. 66-7.

25. *ibid.*, p. 75.

26. *ibid.*, p. 90.

27. *ibid.*, pp. 101-2.

28. *ibid.*, p. 108.

29. *ibid.*, p. 106.

30. *ibid.*, p. 118.

31. *ibid.*, p. 139.

and other grain crops.³² 'We travelled for three leagues on level roads,' he adds, 'all through fields of wheat and thin barley.'³³

On entering Amhara from the north he wondered at its agricultural wealth. Near the church at Makana Sellassie he exclaims: 'It is a wonderful country; there is not a span that is not made use of, and sown with all sorts of seed except millet, which they have not got. This plain has fresh crops all the year round, one gathered in and another sown.'³⁴ The best barley he saw was in the region of Dabra Libanos, but the plots were small. 'In the tilled fields', he reports, 'they sow in many places three or four bushels of seed in a tillage, and at the distance of a crossbow shot from there a similar quantity; so the land is divided, and all the villages have their sowed land scattered. There were not as much as six *alqueres* (bushels) of sowing for any one cultivator or inhabitant, though the land is the best that could be mentioned.'³⁵

Plenty also reigned in the province of Fatajar, to the east, where the 'small and low hills' were 'all made use of for much tillage of wheat and barley',³⁶ and in Damot where there was 'plenty of fresh provisions of various sorts'.³⁷

In the empire as a whole, he concluded, there were large supplies of wheat and barley, as well as 'much *taff*, and *dagusha* (seeds not known to us), pulses, beans, peas, and all vegetables in great quantity and abundance'.³⁸ He found much basil in thickets, but few pot herbs as no one bothered to plant them.

Agricultural conditions at the height of Grañ's invasion were described by Castanhoso who indicates that, though he saw most of the crops described by Alvares, supplies were often scarce as the inhabitants had been 'much despoiled and for long had neither ploughed nor sown'.³⁹ This picture is confirmed by the chronicle of Galawdewos which states that famines broke out in 1540 and 1543, during the first of which conditions exceeded in severity those which existed at the time of the destruction of the second temple.⁴⁰

Agricultural prosperity appears to have returned by the time of Almeida, who was impressed by the resources and wealth of the land he came to convert. In the region of Dambea, he saw 'fine

32. *ibid.*, p. 152.

33. *ibid.*, p. 153.

34. *ibid.*, p. 155.

35. *ibid.*, p. 163.

36. *ibid.*, p. 303.

37. *ibid.*, p. 406.

38. *ibid.*, p. 407.

39. Whiteway, p. 8.

40. Conzelman, pp. 123, 138.

fields of very rich and fertile soil for a distance of about twenty leagues long and four or five wide',⁴¹ while near Fremona he found wheat and barley 'everywhere'.⁴²

Elaborating on the influence of altitude on climate, he declared that the high and cold country produced plenty of wheat and barley, while the hotter lands grew other varieties of grain in great quantities.⁴³ Thus in the high plateau of Wagara (i.e. between Wolkefit and Gondar), the people were well supplied with wheat and barley,⁴⁴ while in the valleys there was *dagusa*, and a type of sorghum called *zangada*.⁴⁵ The crops of the warmer lands also included some fifteen or twenty varieties of millet, as well as *tef* which was highly esteemed as it grew well and gave adequate nourishment. Its seed was so fine that ten, though rather long and thin, might be equal to a grain of mustard. There were also many chick-peas and beans, as well as mustard, plenty of very good garden cabbages, and vegetables of the turnip family which were called *uxises* and *dannaches*⁴⁶ (*wushish* and *dennich*). They had a flower resembling saffron which could be used like it as vermilion and yellow dye.⁴⁷

He also reported seeing a large number of fragrant, medicinal and other plants, including rue, house-lock, dill, fennel, wild sweet basil, coriander, onions, and garlic.⁴⁸

The Italian traveller Baratti, writing a generation later, confirmed much of the above account, mentioning the cultivation of peas, lentils, barley and wheat; he declares with probable exaggeration that Ethiopian corn was very good and bigger than that of Italy in most places.⁴⁹

The great history of Ludolphus, which also devotes some attention to Ethiopian agriculture, agrees with the accounts of the above-mentioned travellers as to the bounty of nature there. 'The fertility of the Soyl of Habessinia', it says, 'is to be admir'd; for the land where it admits of Tillage, abounds in all sorts of Fruits. The long summers affording that extraordinary plenty that in the same place you shall find seed-time and Harvest;

41. Almeida, p. 45.

42. *ibid.*, p. 37. *Vide* also Beccari, Vol. II, p. 248.

43. Almeida, p. 45. *Vide* also Beccari, Vol. II, p. 248.

44. Almeida, pp. 41-2.

45. *Eleusine multiflora*.

46. *Denich* is the Amharic for potato; the reference is to *Coleus edulis*, now called the 'Galla potato'. *Vide* Beccari, Vol II, p. 249; Bruce, Vol. III, p. 584; Wylde, p. 265.

47. Almeida, pp. 42, 45-6. *Vide* also Arab-Faqih, p. 463.

48. Almeida, p. 47.

49. Baratti, pp. 207-8.

which is in some places double, in others threefold. For Grain and Pulse, the Habessines have not only those known to us, Wheat, Barley, Millet, and the like; but also another sort unknown to us, which they call *Tef*, which makes a very good Bread . . . Rye they have none: Yet when Gregory smelt to a Rye Loaf, he said, it was the true *Tef*, and that it had the smell of *Tef*. He looked upon Oats as not worth sowing, saying, it was no better esteem'd than Cockle in their Country: for that Barley and Grass only was the general Food of their Horses.⁵⁰ Though 'herbs of all sorts' grew in the country (black) pepper was non-existent,⁵¹ but this was due to the 'carelessness to plant' rather than to the 'fault of the Soyl'.⁵²

Poncet, who incidentally had no eye for agriculture, was equally impressed with Ethiopian crop production. On crossing the frontier from the Sudan at Serke he could not help exclaiming that he had entered 'a world of pleasant fountains' (i.e. springs) and the mountains were 'so well cultivated' that there seemed no waste ground at all.⁵³ 'There is no country', he concluded, 'better peopled or more fertile than Aethiopia. All the fields, and even the mountains, of which there are a great number, are well cultivated.'⁵⁴

By the end of our period agricultural progress in England and other parts of Western Europe had caused foreign visitors to take a less enthusiastic view of Ethiopian agriculture, which had failed to change with the times. Bruce, who was himself a country squire, therefore paints a more critical picture of Ethiopian agriculture than any of his predecessors. He suggests that Ethiopian crop yields were by now considerably inferior to those of Europe – indeed he contrasts them unfavourably even with those of Egypt, declaring that sometimes the Ethiopian farmer hardly reaped the seed he sowed. 'In Tigre', he states, 'it is a good harvest that produces nine after one, it scarcely ever is known to produce ten.'⁵⁵ He writes of an average harvest elsewhere of 'twenty after one'.⁵⁶

Modern examination of the nutritional value of Ethiopia's

50. Ludolphus, p. 48.

51. Ludolphus is here referring to black pepper, of the *Piper* family, known in Amharic as *qundo barbare*, not to red pepper, of the *Capsicum* group, known in Ethiopia as *barbare* which was probably native to the country.

52. *ibid.*, p. 50.

53. Poncet, p. 111.

54. *ibid.*, p. 127.

55. Bruce, Vol. III, p. 124.

56. *ibid.*, 3rd ed., Vol. II, p. 77.

cereals reveals that the national grain, *tef* (*erogrostis abyssinica*), was an excellent food with a remarkably high calcium and iron content. This can be seen from the following analysis issued in 1959 by the United States Interdepartmental Committee on Nutrition for National Defence.⁵⁷

NUTRIENT COMPOSITION OF SOME ETHIOPIAN FOOD CROPS

Name	Water %	Energy Calories per 100 gm.	Protein %	Fat %	Calcium mg.
Tef . . .	11.2	353	9.1	2.2	110
Mashila . . .	11.0	343	10.1	3.3	39
Maize . . .	12.0	356	9.5	4.3	7
Wheat . . .	12.0	334	12.2	2.3	36
Musa ensete, two {	43.7	224	25	1	44
types . . . {	56.3	202	1.2	2	120
Dagusa . . .	11.7	332	6.5	7.5	56
Barley . . .	12.0	332	11.0	1.8	33

	Iron mg.	Vitamin A Potency I.u.	Thiamine mg.	Riboflavin mg.	Niacin mg.
Tef . . .	90.0	—	.47	.11	2.1
Mashila . . .	4.2	200	.41	.15	4.0
Maize . . .	2.3	450	.45	.11	2.0
Wheat . . .	4.0	—	.41	.10	4.6
Musa ensete, two {	7.7	—	—	.02	.04
types . . . {	5.3	—	.03	.04	.12
Dagusa . . .	3.8	—	.63	.14	.9
Barley . . .	3.6	—	.46	.12	5.5

Apart from the principal crops, such as cereals, legumes and vegetables which naturally attracted the eye of visiting travellers, mention must be made of other agricultural produce, such as oil-seeds, the 'false banana', *chat*, coffee, cotton, fruit, sugar-cane and honey. The most common oil-seed, then as now, was *nug*,⁵⁸ the cultivation of which, in the Farso area, is referred to by Alvares.⁵⁹ Almeida a century later stated that it was crushed to obtain an oil which resembled the sesame oil of India but tasted better and was also used, like linseed oil, for painting as well as for cooking. This latter seed, too, was cultivated, though not for growing flax, but as an ingredient of the thin pap in which the Ethiopians moistened their *injera* or bread.⁶⁰

57. U.S. Interdepartmental Committee on Nutrition, Section IV, Table 6.

58. *Guizotia abyssinica*.

59. Alvarez, p. 106.

60. Almeida, pp. 42, 45-6. *Vide* also Beccari, Vol. II, p. 249; Bruce Vol. III, p. 505.

An important crop which played a vital role in the economy of certain areas⁶¹ of the south was the so-called 'false banana' *musa ensete*.⁶² Mentioned in the fourteenth century by Ibn Fadl Allah,⁶³ it was described two centuries later by Almeida, who says he saw it at Azazo in Dancaz.⁶⁴ Its trunk was in some cases so thick that two men could with difficulty embrace it. When cut, five hundred, seven hundred and sometimes a thousand grew in its place. There was no edible fruit, but the tree itself was eaten, either sliced and boiled, or crumbled and ground into meal, which was put in pits in the ground where it kept for many years, and was taken out and made into bread or pap. It was mostly consumed in Enarea where the plants grew together thickly like the Indian fig-tree, but did not need to be watered. The leaves or leaf-stalks were also useful. They were unravelled into a material like thin flax which was made into 'very good and handsome mats'.⁶⁵

Father Lobo wrote with even greater enthusiasm of the economic value of the plant, a drawing of which later appeared in Ludolphus' *History*. It was, Lobo said, 'wonderfully useful'; its leaves, which were 'so large to cover a Man', made 'Hangings for Rooms' and served 'instead of Linnen for Tables and Carpets'; the branches and the thick parts of the leaves were ground and mixed with milk to form 'a delicious Food'; the trunk and the Roots were even more nourishing and were used by 'the meaner People' when they went on a journey. When cut down within half a foot of the ground, if several incisions were made in the stump each would put out a new sprout, which could be transplanted and grow into a tree. 'The Abyssins', he adds, 'report that this Tree when it is cut down, Groans like a Man, and on this account, call cutting down an *Ensete* Killing it. On the top grows a bunch of five or six Figs, of a Taste not very agreeable which they set in the Ground to produce more Trees.'⁶⁶ This valuable plant, according to Bruce, was almost certainly native to Enarea, but was also cultivated in the north where some said it had been brought by the Gallas. By the end of the eighteenth century it grew 'to great perfection' at Gondar, though it was more plentiful in Maitsha and Goutto to the west

61. *Vide* Smeds, *passim*.

62. *Ensete ventricosum*.

63. Gaudefroy-Demombynes, pp. 9-12, 26-8.

64. Lobo, pp. 109-10. *Vide* also Beccari, Vol. VIII, p. 36; Vol. II, p. 249.

64. Beccari, Vol. VI, p. 387.

65. Almeida, pp. 47-8.

of the Blue Nile where there were 'extensive plantations' as *ensete* was the staple food of the local Gallas.⁶⁷

The cultivation of the narcotic *chat*⁶⁸ was also widespread in certain parts of the country, principally in the Harar area. The plant is believed to have been native to Ethiopia, and according to Ibn Fadl Allah, was introduced across the Red Sea into the Yaman during the reign of the Yamani ruler, Malik Muayyad (1296-1321).⁶⁹ Throughout the period covered by the present volume it was eaten exclusively by the Muslim population of Ethiopia and is mentioned as being very popular among them in the chronicle of Amda Tseyon (1314-1344).⁷⁰ Ibn Fadl Allah states that it was widely consumed by the followers of Islam who believed that it stimulated the intelligence, inducing an ecstatic condition in which a man lost his appetite, his thirst and his desire for sexual intercourse; it was often eaten by Muslims wishing to keep awake while working or travelling.⁷¹ Arab-Faqih says it was cultivated in considerable quantities in the region of Wilqam (west of Harar) and that when the people of Dawaro wished to surrender to Grañ it was one of the articles they chose as a peace offering.⁷² The plant was not unknown in northern Ethiopia, a village in Begemder being known in the eighteenth century as *chat wuha*, or chat water. It is related in the royal chronicles that in 1791 three chiefs in the Gondar area made a covenant of friendship by swearing an oath of loyalty during which they chewed *chat* according to the Galla custom.⁷³

Coffee was another plant grown in the Harar area which was carried into Arabia, according to Arab tradition probably in the fifteenth century.⁷⁴ Arab-Faqih, writing a hundred years later, mentions it as an important commodity in the south, at Dawaro, and as another of the articles given to Grañ as tribute by the inhabitants of that place.⁷⁵

Its cultivation in Northern Ethiopia was not significant in this

67. Bruce, Vol. V, p. 37 et seq.; Vol. III, pp. 584, 258.

68. *Catha edulis* or *celastrus edulis*, or in Arabic *qat*, vide Trimingham, p. 228 n.

69. Gaudefroy-Demombynes, pp. 12-13, 26; Burton, Vol. I, pp. 61-2.

70. Perruchon, *Histoire des Guerres d'Amda Seyon*, p. 483.

71. Gaudefroy-Demombynes, pp. 9-12, 26-8.

72. Arab-Faqih, pp. 151, 209, 211, 300.

73. Blundell, pp. 421, 537.

74. For various Arab traditions, vide the article 'Kahwa' in the *Encyclopedia of Islam*, and Beccari, Vol. XIV, p. 34.

75. Arab-Faqih, pp. 151, 209, 211, 300.

period, and is in fact ignored by Alvares, though Almeida says that it grew at Azazo in Dancaz.⁷⁶ Bruce, though of opinion that it was native to all moist lowlands of Ethiopia, mentions a tradition that it was brought north by the western Gallas. In his day these people ate the roasted beans which they pulverized and mixed with butter to form hard balls about the size of those used in billiards. These, they said, 'kept them in strength and spirits during a day's fatigue better than a loaf of bread or a meal of meat'.⁷⁷ Poncet, writing at the close of the seventeenth century, states that the Ethiopians did not 'esteem it much', made 'no use' of it and cultivated it 'only as a curiosity'.⁷⁸ The bush, he adds, 'resembles very much the myrtle. Its leaves are always green, but larger and more tufted. It bears a fruit like the pistacho-nut, and on the top a husk, in which are contained two beans, and this is what they call coffee. This husk is green at the beginning, but as it grows more ripe becomes a darker colour. 'Tis a mistake that they put coffee into boiling water to prevent the growth of it (as some have affirm'd). They shell it from the husks in which it grows, and send it away without much ado'.⁷⁹ Coffee drinking at this time was undoubtedly more popular among Muslims than Christians.⁸⁰

Cotton, as explained in later pages, was the principal textile used in Ethiopian dress and was grown extensively in many parts of the country. Brother Thomas of Angot was perhaps the first authority in our period to refer to its cultivation; Zorzi quoted him as saying that there grew in the country a 'great tree' with 'balls as big as pomegranates, full of a certain silk as fine as silk and more lustrous and fair'; it was used to make 'embroideries for the Presta and also for the great lords'.⁸¹ Cotton, Alvares confirms, was grown in many places; the inhabitants wore 'much' cotton cloth,⁸² though in the very cold country serge, i.e. woollen cloth, was preferred. Flax, as we have seen, was also cultivated, but only for the seeds; Alvares found that it 'gave no fibre and no stuff was made with it'.⁸³

Cotton is also mentioned in the seventeenth century by Pero Pais, who said that Susneyos planted many plants, and by Almeida who said it grew in bushes like that of India and was

76. Beccari, Vol. VI, p. 387.

77. Bruce, Vol. V, p. 37; Vol. II, p. 226.

78. Poncet, pp. 106, 155.

79. *ibid.*, p. 155.

80. Bruce, Vol. III, p. 13.

81. *Ethiopian Itineraries*, p. 171.

82. Much cotton was also imported.

83. Alvarez, p. 407.

used for the manufacture of cloth 'some of it very good and fine'. It was to be found in the warmer climate of the valleys, particularly in those of Gojam, Begemder and Oleca (Walaka, the region of the river of that name).⁸⁴

Poncet has much the same story to tell of the western provinces at the end of the seventeenth century. He says that on entering Ethiopia from the Sudan he passed for eight days through a tract of country from Giesim to Abiad, some eighty or ninety miles in extent, which was 'fill'd with cotton'.⁸⁵

Throughout this period travellers commented also on Ethiopia's fruit. Ibn Fadl Allah mentions the existence in the fourteenth century of bananas, citrons, lemons, pomegranates, apricots, wild peaches, grapes, and an uneatable type of fig, as well as a number of other fruits and berries⁸⁶ unknown in Egypt, Syria or Iraq;⁸⁷ the chronicle of the Baeda Maryam (1468-1478) suggests that this Emperor took a keen interest in the cultivation of fruit trees, and planted citrons, grapes and bananas.⁸⁸

Early in the sixteenth century Brother Raphael told Zorzi that lemons, citrons, oranges and grapes all grew to 'full perfection', that gourds were plentiful but that melons were unknown and dates were 'not as good as those of Cairo because they like sand'.⁸⁹ The author of the *Carta* also mentions seeing grapes, oranges, figs and peaches in the neighbourhood of Bizen monastery,⁹⁰ while Alvares refers to the cultivation in many parts of the north of grapes and peaches, which ripened in February and were over at the end of April, as well as of oranges, lemons and citrons.⁹¹ He adds that in Angot he saw an 'infinite quantity' of Indian figs,⁹² as well as lemons, oranges and citrons,⁹³ and that ginger, grapes and peaches were obtained in the Gurage area.⁹⁴

84. Beccari, Vol. II, p. 260; Almeida, pp. 26, 47, 60, 86.

85. Poncet, pp. 112-13.

86. These included, he says, the *awjat* (or the *agam* according to Guidi) which produced a seed somewhat like pepper but larger in size, and the *Kushi* (*kosso*?) with round bitter yellow fruit. He also refers to several 'fruit trees' which have not been identified; the *kashbad* with sweet red fruit, the *lamuya* with sweet black fruit, and the *tana* with fruit smaller than dates.

87. Gaudefroy-Demombynes, pp. 9-12, 26-8.

88. Perruchon, *Les Chroniques de Zara Yaeqob et de Baeda Maryam*, pp. 118, 148, 160.

89. *Ethiopian Itineraries*, pp. 141-3. *Vide* also Alvarez, p. 407.

90. *The Discovery of Abyssinia*, pp. 75-8.

91. Alvarez, p. 408.

92. According to Dr. H. F. Mooney, trees of the *Ficus* species native to Ethiopia and resembling the Indian Banyan.

93. *ibid.*, p. 139.

94. *ibid.*, p. 348.

Arab-Faqih also mentions an abundance of pomegranates, peaches, excellent quinces, together with bananas and ginger in the vicinity of Lake Haiq.⁹⁵

Susneyos (1607-1632) seems to have taken a great interest in the extension of fruit cultivation. According to Pero Pais he planted one hundred and fifty vines which were immediately so successful that he planted a further five thousand and ordered his subjects to plant these and other fruit trees on their own account. He also sowed a number of papaya seeds which had been brought to him from India.⁹⁶

Almeida, who wrote during this reign, mentions the existence of large numbers of senna trees, many oranges and lemons of the French and Galician varieties, and large sweet citrons. In Dambea, the province of the court, he found very many ordinary figs and Indian figs, as well as a Portuguese variety which had recently been sown.⁹⁷ There were also, he says, large quantities of good peaches.⁹⁸ Most fruit trees grew wild, the main exception being the vine which was extensively cultivated in many places. There was, therefore, no shortage of sacramental wine in this region where it was also used to alleviate the fast in Lent. The islands on Lake Tana, which were very hot, abounded in all kinds of thorn fruits, citrons and lemons of both the Galician and French varieties, which grew there better than anywhere else, as well as a large number of good Indian figs.⁹⁹

Poncet subsequently wrote of forests 'fill'd with orange trees, citron trees and pomegranate trees',¹⁰⁰ and a great amount of cardamom and ginger, the latter with a most agreeable scent. Describing the province of Shire, he adds: 'You meet there with delicious plains, watered with fountains and filled with spacious forests of orange trees, citrons and pomegranate trees.'¹⁰¹ Further orange and lemon trees were planted at Azazo by command of Iyasu II (1730-1755).¹⁰²

Without a cold winter season, however, the fruit of deciduous trees such as apples and pears could not be grown in Ethiopia, as Ludolphus pointed out.¹⁰³

The cultivation of the sugar-cane was first mentioned in the

95. Arab-Faqih, pp. 326-8.

96. Beccari, Vol. II, p. 250.

97. Almeida, p. 47. *Vide* also Arab-Faqih, p. 463.

101. *ibid.*, p. 145.

102. Bruce, Vol. III, pp. 498-9; Vol. II, p. 633.

98. Almeida, p. 48.

99. *ibid.*, pp. 35-6.

100. Poncet, p. 127.

103. Ludolphus, p. 50.

fourteenth century by Ibn Fadl Allah.¹⁰⁴ In the following century the planting of the cane was referred to by the chronicler of the Emperor Baeda Maryam,¹⁰⁵ and its cultivation was confirmed by Brother Raphael.¹⁰⁶ Alvares, on the other hand, observed that though 'infinite quantities' were to be found in many parts of the country the inhabitants did not know how to make use of it.¹⁰⁷ Arab-Faqih, who saw it growing in the neighbourhood of Lake Haiq, underlines its value when he states that it was one of the three articles given to Grañ by the people of Dawaro at the time of their surrender.¹⁰⁸ Almeida also emphasizes the importance of the cane which, he says, grew tall and thick in the region of Dambea and Lake Tana; he considered it of good quality though inferior to that of India.¹⁰⁹ During the Gondar period a number of plantations were established, according to Bruce, not far from the city.¹¹⁰

Honey, which was used in huge quantities in the manufacture of mead, was undoubtedly a more important source of sugar. Most observers of this period agree that it was in plentiful supply, among them Brother Raphael¹¹¹ and Alvares, who says there was a 'great quantity' in the country and that hives were often 'not in apiaries but inside the houses where the cultivators live, clinging to the walls on the inside, where they have a mode of egress outside'. Hives were first placed near trees to attract bees, and as soon as they had entered them would be taken into the houses. A great number of these hives were also to be found in monasteries, and constituted an important source of livelihood for the monks,^{112 113}

Castanhoso was also amazed by the unending supplies of honey and beeswax. At Easter, for example, he witnessed a procession with so many large candles that he exclaimed that there must have been more on that occasion than existed in the whole of Portugal.¹¹⁴ In the following century Barradas reported that some of the best honey came from the provinces of Agame and Enderta.¹¹⁵

104. Gaudefroy-Demombynes, pp. 9-12, 26-8.

105. Perruchon, *Les Chroniques de Zara Yaeqob et de Baeda Maryam*, 160.

106. *Ethiopian Itineraries*, p. 169. 107. Alvarez, p. 407.

108. Arab-Faqih, pp. 151, 209, 211, 300, 326-8.

109. Almeida, pp. 35, 48.

110. Bruce, Vol. III, p. 194.

111. *Ethiopian Itineraries*, pp. 141-3. Vide also Gaudefroy-Demombynes, p. 29.

112. Alvarez, p. 408.

113. See note 1 on p. 137.

114. Whiteway, pp. 59, 90, 92.

115. Beccari, Vol. IV, pp. 96, 209.

Chapter 14

Livestock

THE ANIMALS of Ethiopia were first heard of in Europe through Marco Polo in the thirteenth century. He stated that the country possessed elephants, giraffes, lions, leopards and lynxes, monkeys of many sorts, and 'a multitude of beasts different from those of our countries'. There were also 'wild asses in plenty', 'birds of many sorts unlike those found elsewhere . . . the prettiest hens to be seen anywhere' and 'enormous ostriches scarcely smaller than a donkey', as well as coloured parrots and Maimon cats 'of such distinctive appearance that some of them can almost be said to have the faces of men'.¹

Zorzi's informants, being natives of the country, provided more complete and reliable information. Brother Raphael of Angot said that his country was supplied with 'countless' domestic animals, including fair horses, mules, asses, and very great dogs; there were plenty of stags, roebucks, hares and gazelles, as well as wild animals such as elephants, lions, panthers, giraffes, lynxes, rhinoceroses and huge serpents, some of whom could eat a chicken whole.² Brother Thomas of Ganget also told Zorzi of the existence of 'large numbers' of elephants whose tusks represented an important source of wealth. They were found, he said, in forests, hills and damp woody places, such as Gedden (Gedem),³ Gen (Ganh),⁴ Angot, Geda (Ghedda?), Tigre and Massawa.⁵

The Portuguese, who were more interested in the country's cattle, were well satisfied with the abundance of livestock which they found there. The author of the *Carta* mentions seeing 'quite seven or eight thousand cows' in the valleys around the monastery of Bizen,⁶ while Alvares refers to good pastures,⁷ extensive breeding of cows, sheep, goats, horses and mules,⁸ and 'an

1. Marco Polo, pp. 251-2. *Vide* also Gaudefroy-Demombynes, pp. 28-9.

2. *Ethiopian Itineraries*, p. 143.

3. Forty miles south of Dessie.

4. According to Crawford probably in the region of Angot or Amhara.

5. *ibid.*, p. 177.

6. *The Discovery of Abyssinia*, pp. 75-8.

7. Alvares, p. 139.

8. *ibid.*, pp. 50-1, 303.

infinite number of fowls', a hundred of which could often be bought in exchange for a little pepper.⁹ In the Mai Tzada area of Tigre he saw 'infinite herds'.¹⁰ Describing the 'beautiful herds of cows' which he saw in the neighbourhood of Farso he declared: 'those of our company guessed them at fifty thousand cows. I do not say a larger number, and yet the multitude cannot be believed.'¹¹

Bermudes, writing of the period of Grañ's invasion, also describes a great abundance of cattle, horses, buffaloes, mules, asses, and sheep; he said that the cattle of Ethiopia were much larger than those of Portugal, some of them he claimed, somewhat imaginatively, being 'almost as large as elephants'. Their horns, he added, could hold a whole pitcherful and were used instead of barrels to transport and store wine and water.¹²

Almeida, whose survey of the subject is more elaborate than that of Alvares, confirms that the Ethiopians possessed all the domestic animals known in Europe, such as sheep, goats, oxen and cows, and that it was 'a fine thing' to see the 'great herds of very handsome oxen and cows', particularly in Tigre and among the Agaos. He says that near Fremona he saw 'many springs and streams', as well as meadows with 'much grass', and 'all kinds of cattle'.¹³ He states that the Gallas and Gafates (inhabitants of Gafat, south of the Blue Nile) supported themselves entirely by meat and milk, and did not sow much grain. Even their horses were given milk with their barley – a diet on which they flourished.

Cattle, wrote Almeida, were normally very large and were reared in great numbers in most parts of the country where they constituted the principal wealth of the people. One type of ox, called *Gueche*,¹⁴ was kept solely for slaughter and did not work; it made excellent meat. Cattle hides were also of considerable importance as they were sewn into bags and served as containers for liquids; these could be carried safely on long journeys without danger of breaking like bottles or jars.¹⁵

'Countless' donkeys served mainly for draught; some were used to teach oxen to plough and others again were ridden by the rich who preferred them to other animals for this purpose. The

9. *ibid.*, p. 132.

10. *ibid.*, pp. 66–7.

11. *ibid.*, p. 107.

12. Whiteway, p. 235.

13. Almeida, p. 37.

14. Amharic *gosh*, or buffalo.

15. Almeida, p. 50.

lower classes used both she-mules and he-mules as draught animals, though many of the former also served the nobility and common people for steeds, being handsome and not easily fatigued. Even those who had horses rode their mules leading the horses by the right hand except in battle or during displays at court, when horses came into their own.

There were many wild elephants, but, according to Almeida, no tame one had ever been seen in the country, the Ethiopians being greatly surprised when told about those tamed in India. There were also many lions and tigers (cheetahs?) some of them very big. Foxes (jackals?), wolves (hyenas or wild dogs, such as the *takula*, or hunting dog?), leopards, apes and monkeys were 'innumerable'. Wild cats and civet cats, the latter yielding a perfume which was used to scent clothes,¹⁶ deer, stags, gazelles, wild goats, hares and rabbits, and wild pigs were also plentiful, for the ordinary people were 'not much given to hunting'.¹⁷

Almeida declared that there were many hippopotamuses in Lake Tana which came out to graze on land and did great damage to the crops. The inhabitants of the area lived by hunting and killing them; they ate their flesh and from their hide made *Alengas* (*alanga*) or whips with which they drove mules and horses as they did not use spurs.¹⁸

The learned Ludolphus confirms that Ethiopian cows were 'of an unusual bigness, far exceeding those in Russia and Hungaria', and declared that the biggest he could show Gregory in Europe he called but 'middle siz'd'.¹⁹ There were also sheep whose tails were 'fat and ponderous', weighing between ten and forty pounds.²⁰ Ethiopian cattle appeared large to Europeans at this time as livestock in Europe tended to be underfed during the bitter winters whereas in Ethiopia grazing was possible all the year round. This, it should be noted, was the period before the introduction of turnips and other winter foodstuffs and when selective breeding was still in its infancy. It was evident, however, that the Ethiopians were behind Western Europe in animal husbandry, for, according to Ludolphus, they 'neither sowed nor mowed for the sake of their Cattel'.²¹

Bruce agrees that in his day, too, livestock was plentiful. In

16. This practice is still known in Ethiopia.

17. *ibid.*, pp. 50-53. *Vide* also Beccari, Vol. II, p. 233.

18. Almeida, pp. 35-6.

20. *ibid.*, p. 53.

19. Ludolphus, p. 52.

21. *ibid.*, p. 48.

Wagara, for example, he saw 'vast flocks of cattle of all kinds', mostly black, with 'large and beautiful horns, exceedingly wide, and bosses upon their back like camels'.²² Gojam was 'full of great herds . . . the largest in the high parts of Abyssinia'.²³ Of Halai, in Tigre, he writes: 'All sorts of cattle are here in great plenty; cows and bulls of exquisite beauty, especially the former; they are, for the most part, completely white, with large dewlaps hanging down to their knees, their heads, horns and hoofs perfectly well-turned; the horns wide like our Lincolnshire Kine; and their hair like silk. Their sheep are large and all black. I never saw one of any other colour in the province of Tigre. Their heads are large; their ears remarkably short and small; instead of the wool they have hair as all the sheep within the tropics have, but this is remarkable for its lustre and softness, without any bristle quality, such as those in Beja or the country of Sennar; but they are neither so fat nor is their flesh so good as that of the sheep in the warmer country. The goats here, too, are of the largest size; but they are not very rough, nor is their hair long.'²⁴ In a later passage, again describing Tigre, he adds: 'The cattle roam at discretion through the mountains. The herdsmen set fire to the grass and brushwood before the rains and an amazing verdure immediately follows. As the mountains are very steep and broken, goats are chiefly the flocks that graze upon them.'²⁵

As far as horses were concerned Alvares says that they were numerous, but mostly of poor quality, like the Galician, though a few were 'the size of elephants and very fat'. The best, however, were imported. Those from Arabia were 'very good, like Moorish horses', and those from Egypt 'much better, very tall and handsome'.²⁶ Not being shod, however, they often foundered, with the result that if the Prester travelled far the villages through which he passed would be full of foundered horses who would afterwards be taken away at leisure.²⁷

Almeida, Barradas and Pero Pais all agree that there were plenty of powerful horses of a fine breed, the best being those

22. Bruce, 1st ed., Vol. III, p. 191.

23. *ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 256.

24. *ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 82-3.

25. *ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 125.

26. Alvarez, pp. 324, 412.

27. *ibid.*, p. 218. *Vide* also Whiteway, p. 235.

that came from the kingdom of Dequin²⁸ in the Sudan which belonged to the Ballous and Funchos. Those of Tigre and especially of Hamasien were also good; though not as big as those of the Sudan, they were very spirited and handsome, like Andalusians, and were held in high esteem in Dambea. The number of nags was so great that they were worth next to nothing.²⁹

Poncet, writing almost a century later, confirms that the best horses came from Serac (now central Eritrea, and not far from Hamasien) which supplied the Emperor's stables, while Bruce several generations later tells us that horses of the Tigre region, inland from Digsä, were often mated with animals from Sennar which 'kept up the breed'.³⁰

Reference must also be made to the civet cat whose musk was destined to become a major export. Pero Pais learnt in the early seventeenth century that it had been domesticated in Enarea where it was kept in cages,³¹ while a century or so later Poncet and Bruce indicate that commercial rearing also took place in the northern area. Poncet says that in the region of Emfras to the east of Lake Tana the cats were reared in 'prodigious number', many merchants owning as many as three hundred. 'This sort of cat', he adds, 'is fed with some difficulty; they give it thrice a week raw beef, and other days a kind of milk pottage. They perfume this animal from time to time with sweet odours; and once a week they gently scrape off an unctious matter which issues from the body with sweat. 'Tis this excrement³² which they call civet, from the name of the beast. They put it up carefully into a beef's horn which they kept well stopt.'³³ Bruce, on the other hand, says of the 'many civet cats' he saw around Cherkin that the inhabitants did not know how to extract the civet, this art being possessed only by Muslims.³⁴

Fish abounded in many rivers and lakes but did not constitute a major item of diet, except perhaps among the rich in some

28. The Kingdom of Dequin is marked on Le Grand's map between Sennar and the region where the Mareb disappears in the sand. Crawford identifies it with the country round Kassala, where there is a place or district called Dugein.

29. Almeida, pp. 50-3; Beccari, Vol. II, p. 229; Vol. IV, p. 104; Vol. VIII, pp. 37-8.

30. Poncet, p. 146; Bruce, Vol. III, p. 102.

31. Beccari, Vol. II, p. 233.

32. Actually not excrement but a glandular extract.

33. Poncet, pp. 136-7.

34. Bruce, Vol. IV, p. 296.

areas during Lent. Fishing was often performed, as a chronicle of the eighteenth century records, by throwing the crushed seeds of a plant called *berbera*³⁵ into a river whereupon the fish became temporarily stupefied and easily caught.³⁶

Throughout this period the prowess of the hunter was held in great esteem. Bruce, for example, mentions great public hunts organized by the Emperors Yostos (1711-1716) and Iyasu II (1730-1755) in which all the nobles participated. On such occasions, he says, every young man would bring to the sovereign a part of the beast he had slain; he would then be awarded one of two ivory bracelets: two for a lion, elephant, rhinoceros or giraffe, one for a pair of boars or four deer. On obtaining as many bracelets as would cover the entire arm the victor would be awarded a certificate entitling him to an estate the annual revenue of which must be at least twenty ounces of gold. All elephants' tusks were considered the property of the king.³⁷

35. *Berbera ferruginosa*.

36. Bruce, Vol. III, pp. 502, 547; Blundell, p. 206.

37. Bruce, Vol. II, pp. 540-2.

Chapter 15

Forestry

TRADITIONALLY wood was often very scarce in inhabited areas. Thus Almeida states there was 'not much woodland' in the Ethiopia of his day, partly because the inhabitants cut down large quantities of trees for house-building and for use as fuel, and partly because they never thought of re-afforestation.¹ Bruce similarly mentions a 'great scarcity of fuel' in the vicinity of Gondar as in many areas all the trees had been cut down to make room for the plough. The Ethiopians, it may be added, made heavy demands on supplies of wood for they had no way of cutting planks, and therefore used a whole branch or tree in the manufacture of every beam.²

A wide variety of trees nevertheless grew in different parts of the country. Almeida reported that the two most important in Gojam were the *podocarpus* or *zegba*³ and the *anza* (*wanza*)⁴ which made good timber like teak or maple, though unfortunately it seldom grew straight. *Kosso*,⁵ the flowers of which when brewed yielded the famous specific for tape-worm, was found at Amba Geshen and in nearly all the high and cold parts of the country; it had a hard and red wood and bore lamp-like flowers similar to those of the chestnut with fruit like ears of corn. There was also a useful shrub called *endod*,⁶ which resembled jasmine in the stem though it had larger and thicker leaves; it bore fruit like clusters of pepper which were used for washing clothes. Bamboo was found in tall thickets in many parts of the country, which were also 'well supplied' with various kinds of firewood, including thorn-bushes and other trees that were as tall as pines.⁷ Myrrh and frankincense trees, as we have seen, had existed in the arid areas of the Horn of Africa at least since the time of the

1. Almeida, pp. 48, 188.

2. Bruce, Vol. III, p. 192; Harris, Vol. III, p. 345.

3. *Podocarpus gracilior*.

4. *Cordia abyssinica*. Vide Bruce, Vol. V, pp. 54-6.

5. *Hagenia Abyssinica* or *Brayera anthelminthica*.

6. *Phytolacca dodecandria*.

7. Almeida, pp. 48, 98-9.



A sprig of *kosso* (*Hagenia abyssinica* or *Brayera anthelminthica*) showing the flower from which the famous medicine is made.

From J. Bruce, *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile*.



Above: An agricultural scene. The ploughman is followed by the sower, while a third man brings food in a masob, or basket-table, which he carries on his head. Note type of plough and whip. (From an eighteenth century MS., British Museum Orient 590.)

Below: Ploughing. (From an eighteenth century MS., British Museum Add. 24, 188.)





Fishing with a net. Note the traditional reed boat, or tankwa, used on Lake Tana. (From an early eighteenth century MS., British Museum Orient 713.)

Pharaohs. Some of these myrrh trees seem to have been transplanted at some much later date to the Emfras area by Lake Tana where Bruce saw them towards the end of the eighteenth century. The gum of these trees was then being used by the Muslim merchants to stiffen imported blue Surat cloth which often arrived in a soiled condition.⁸ Another valuable tree mentioned by this writer was the *qulqual*, or *euphorbia candelabrum*; besides being used, as will be seen, in removing the hair from skins it served in some parts of the country as a kind of fence or wind break.⁹

8. Bruce, Vol. V, pp. 28, 31.

9. *ibid.*, Vol. V, p. 43; *ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 504.

Chapter 16

Mineral Wealth

THE LAND of Prester John had been regarded as an important source of gold long before this was confirmed by Marco Polo.¹ It subsequently became apparent that silver and iron were also produced in significant quantities.

Ibn Fadl Allah, writing *circa* 1342–1349, reported that considerable quantities of gold were reaching the Muslim sultanate of Ifat from Damot (a province to the south of the Blue Nile) and that an ounce varied in value between eighty and one hundred *drams*.² Brother Thomas of Angot also asserted that the province of Damot was ‘rich in very fine gold’,³ while Alvares stated that in his day most of the gold came from Damot though an ‘inferior’ type was brought from Gojam.⁴ Gold, he added, could be obtained in Damot by merely digging immediately before or during the rainy season; the water then washed away the soil, leaving the precious metal on the surface. The gold was usually supposed to be collected at night when it could be seen glittering, and he had noticed people digging and searching for it in this way, but by daylight.⁵ He also mentioned the practice of gold-washing near Aksum and said that he had himself attempted it, but without success.⁶

A generation later Castanhoso tells how the Emperor in pleading with the Portuguese to assist him against Grañ stated that ‘there was much gold in his country which he would give them’, and that it came from ‘far inland’ (i.e. to the west) where the ‘bestial’ Cafres lived. These peoples came to a market in the country of Damot ‘in gangs on foot with much gold in bags at their sides’. This they exchanged for coarse Indian cloths and beads of red, blue and green earth which they ‘valued highly and the gold very little’.⁷

1. Marco Polo, p. 252.

2. Gaudefroy-Demombynes, pp. 13, 38.

3. *Ethiopian Itineraries*, p. 149.

4. Alvarez, pp. 348, 350.

5. *ibid.*, p. 348.

6. *ibid.*, p. 85.

7. Whiteway, p. 101.

Bermudes also referred to the country's 'great stores of gold', which he declared superior to those of Peru. He confirmed that the greater part was said to come from Damot the soil of whose rivers, he claimed with obvious exaggeration, contained two parts of gold to one of earth; carried away by his imagination, Bermudes maintained that the precious metal was melted down by artificers more numerous than blacksmiths in Europe, gold being more common in Ethiopia than iron except in Tigre where iron was plentiful; the two metals were generally exchanged in Damot, Bermudes maintains, for equal parts.⁸ He attributed the difficulties of transport in this part of the country to deliberate policy, declaring that the lords of the area would not consent to the building of any bridge or boat lest the crossing of the Blue Nile became sufficiently easy to allow all those who desired the gold to reach Damot. Those wishing to cross the river were therefore dependent on certain buffaloes which were driven into the water laden with sacks full of earth to restrain their movements; the passengers then waded in, holding on to the animals' tails as they swam across.⁹

According to Bermudes, gold was also to be found in Gojam though not in such large quantities as in Damot.¹⁰ Under the sand of certain rivers in that province there were spongy stones, resembling pumice but heavy and yellow, which, he claimed, when melted down almost completely turned into gold with only a little dross remaining.¹¹ To the west the Gafates were also rich in gold for when the Portuguese had entered their villages they had discovered large amounts of it in pots and vessels, as well as under their hearths where they had hidden it.¹²

Almeida, who was anxious to avoid any suspicion of exaggeration, nevertheless observed that Ethiopia possessed 'much gold' which paid for most of her imports.¹³ It was found, he explained, in the form of small grains which indicated that it had been obtained from river beds. A 'considerable quantity' was available in Enarea but most of it did not originate there. As in the time of Cosmas it 'was obtained from Cafres further to the west and south-west who exchanged it for clothing, cows, salt and other goods'.¹⁴ Pero Pais, writing in similar vein, mentions important

8. *ibid.*, pp. 239, 246.

9. *ibid.*, p. 239.

10. *ibid.*, p. 235.

11. *ibid.*, p. 149. *Vide* also Ludolphus, p. 15; Beccari, Vol. VIII, p. 35.

12. *ibid.*, p. 241.

13. *ibid.*, pp. 232-3.

14. Almeida, p. 43.

deposits in Enarea, especially by the River Beber, in the Fazuklo area, and in Wambarya, near Gojam.¹⁵

Gold mines, it was generally agreed, were virtually unknown. Pais says that there had once been one in Tambien, but that it had been closed by the Emperor Sartsa Dengel who was afraid its existence would encourage Turkish aggression.¹⁶ According to Almeida, however, the mine had been reopened during the reign of Susneyos who had actually received a certain amount of gold from it, but work had soon stopped either because the workmen lacked energy and skill and had allowed the vein to be blocked, or because there was in fact little or no gold there.¹⁷

Barradas, on the other hand, rejects this version, stating that Susneyos never received more than specimens of rock and that it had not been ascertained whether they were auriferous or not.¹⁸

Baratti, too, was particularly impressed by the country's mineral wealth. 'Upon the confines of the *Negus* dominions,' he claims, 'near the Kingdom of Damut (Damot) are Mines of Gold about the lake (Tana) out of which the River Niger (Blue Nile) proceeds, so that this river carries away some of the sandy part, and rowls it with the stream that is extreme fierce (for it falls from high Mountains) and runs with a great impetuosity to the main Ocean; upon the sand the *Negers* do pick up much gold which crumbles from the Rocks and proceeds out of the Mines that are dispersed all over the Country.

'The *Negus* hath people daily at work in them, they are commonly men taken from their Enemies. When the Ethiopians go out to War they save the lives of all those that submit themselves to their mercy, and send them to those places to prepare the Gold, and fit it for the use of the people.'¹⁹

Poncet and Bruce draw a similar picture in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries respectively. According to Poncet the 'richest gold mines' were in Enarea and Gojam, whence 'standing armies' carried the precious metal to the capital at Gondar. It was refined and worked into wedges, but Poncet does not tell us whether this was done at the source, *en route* or at the capital. These gold bars reached the imperial treasury and were used for

15. Beccari, Vol. II, pp. 247-8.

16. *ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 247-8.

17. Almeida, p. 43.

18. Beccari, Vol. IV, p. 99.

19. Baratti, pp. 209-10.

the payment of troops and for court expenses.²⁰ 'A great deal of gold' which, he claimed, 'in no ways yields to that of Europe' was found in Tigre where the specimens he had seen he considered 'very fine'.²¹ Such gold, he concludes, was often found in the river beds after the great rains and was 'much more pure' than that obtained from the mines.²²

Bruce expresses the view that most Ethiopian gold came from what he calls the country of the Shanqellas south of the Blue Nile, that it was bought from them at Burye market in Damot by the Agaos who gave them copper, iron, beads and hides and skins in exchange, and that it was taken to Gondar both by Agaos and Muslim traders. The greater part, however, did not reach the capital but was carried to Sennar by Sudanese merchants. This gold was obtained by washing auriferous earth in wooden dishes, the grains which remained being stored by the Shanqellas in quills. The pure metal was subsequently melted down and adulterated, probably by the Agaos, by the admixture of one-tenth part of silver; it was then fashioned into small rods or ingots of a 'very pale colour'. During the reign of the Emperor Iyoas I (1755-1769) an *oquea*, or ounce, of gold was said to be worth only about eight *patacas*, but in Bruce's day it was valued at ten, and sold at Mocha for fifteen or sixteen *patacas*, though Sennar gold fetched twenty-two *patacas*, being less adulterated.²³

The Shanqellas are said to have long weighed their gold with the aid of the seeds of a tree called *kuara*²⁴ which is known among them as *ambilish* and in Amharic as *korch*. Bruce considered these seeds as perhaps the best available choice, as repeated experiments had shown him that from the time of their being gathered they varied little in weight.²⁵

Ibn Fadl Allah relates that he was informed by a Zeila merchant called Izz ed Din that there was at least one silver mine in Ethiopia.²⁶ Alvares, too, referred to silver which, he was told, existed in one of the mountains of Begemder, though, he said, the inhabitants did not know how to extract it efficiently. The method they used was to fill a cave or hollow in the ground with wood and then to set it on fire 'as in a lime kiln', the melted silver

20. Poncet, pp. 125-6.

21. *ibid.*, p. 149.

22. *ibid.*, p. 127.

23. Bruce, 3rd ed., Vol. II, pp. 432, 562-3; Vol. VII, pp. 75, 78. *Vide* also 1st ed., Vol. III, p. 259; Vol. IV, p. 486.

24. *Erythrina abyssinica*.

25. Bruce, Vol. V, pp. 65-6.

26. Gaudefroy-Demombynes, pp. 13, 38.

running out in spouts. Though this seemed 'a thing not to be believed', his compatriot, Pero de Covilhão, who had been in the country for many years 'did not doubt that it was quite true', the more so as silver was 'much sought after'.²⁷

Later observers, however, fail to substantiate these statements. Barradas believed there were considerable deposits of silver in Semien, but had no knowledge of their exploitation. A Portuguese priest called Manoel Magro had refused a request by the Emperor Susneyos to exploit it, ostensibly because he feared trouble with the local population. A certain Egyptian or Armenian, on the other hand, was supposed to have discovered some sort of mine not far from Fremona, though Barradas could not vouch for the truth of the report.²⁸ Almeida and Mendes both mention the discovery in the early seventeenth century of a 'considerable quantity' of silver in the district of Tsalanit, near Lamalmon, but declare that the vein was lost, probably through the stupidity of the workmen, though some said that the inhabitants had objected to the mines, fearing that their fame would arouse the greed of the Turks or others who would make war on them to get control of their wealth.²⁹ Baratti also refers to the existence of silver mines, but said these were not as numerous as the gold mines.³⁰ Silver was in fact not widely available in Ethiopia until the large scale importation of Maria Theresa dollars in the early nineteenth century.

Iron was far more plentiful. Ibn Fadl Allah noted as early as the fourteenth century, that it was found in most parts of the country,³¹ while Brother Raphael of Angot discussing the matter with Zorzi in the following century confirmed that there were 'great quantities' of the metal and that 'very good' ore came from a mine not far from Aksum. He added that because of its availability his compatriots were well equipped with cuirasses of mail, swords and spears, as well as arrows with heads of iron.³² Bermudes, as we have seen, also refers to an abundance of iron in Tigre.³³ Later writers, such as Almeida, Mendes and Barradas, confirmed this picture a century later, stating that the metal was in good supply throughout the land,³⁴ while Bruce at the end of

27. Alvarez, p. 351.

28. Beccari, Vol. IV, p. 102.

29. Almeida, p. 43; Beccari, Vol. VIII, p. 35.

30. Baratti, p. 210.

31. Almeida, pp. 43-4; Beccari, Vol. VIII, p. 35; Vol. IV, p. 101.

32. Gaudefroy-Demombynes, pp. 13, 38.

33. *Ethiopian Itineraries*, p. 143.

34. Whiteway, p. 198.

our period noted that the mountains of Begemder were 'full of iron mines'.³⁵

There are also a number of references to other metals. Bermudes, Mendes, Barradas and Almeida all mention the existence of lead;³⁶ Bermudes said it was mined in the provinces of Amhara and Vendremudo (Begemder); and Barradas that it was to be found in Tambien; Almeida, on the other hand notes that the inhabitants made little use of it.³⁷ This last statement may indicate a retrogression since the days before the devastating invasion of Grañ as Brother Raphael had earlier told Zorzi that lead was widely used to cover the roofs of churches, palaces and forts.³⁸ Bermudes also mentions the existence of certain tin mines in Amhara and Begemder.³⁹

35. Bruce, Vol. III, p. 254.

36. This appears to be an exaggeration; lead is now known to exist only in the area of Lake Zwai.

37. Almeida, pp. 43-4; Beccari, Vol. IV, p. 101; Vol. VIII, p. 35.

38. *Ethiopian Itineraries*, p. 143.

39. Whiteway, p. 232.

Chapter 17

The Peasant's Difficulties

EXAMINING the difficulties encountered by the farmer, Alvares declares that there would have been 'much more fruit and tillage if the great men did not ill-treat the people', for the exactions of the landlords caused the peasants to refrain from producing more than they thought necessary for their own requirements. Elsewhere he remarks that 'no person of the common people may kill a cow (even though it is his own) without leave from the lord of the country'.¹

Another problem 'in all the dominions of Prester John' and especially in Tigre was the locust which wrought fearful destruction in the fields. The multitude of these insects, he remarks, was not to be believed, for they covered the earth and filled the sky, darkening the very light of the sun. Fortunately, he added, these insects did not visit all the provinces every year, for if they did 'the country would be a desert in consequence of the destruction they cause: but one year they are in one part, and another year in another'; it would then be said that 'such and such a Kingdom had been destroyed by the Ambatas' (*anbata*). 'Whenever they come the earth remains as though it had been set on fire . . . when they are on the way it is known a day before, not because the people see them, but because they see the sun yellow, and the earth yellow, that is, the shadow which they cast. Then the people are dismayed, saying we are lost, because the *Ambatas* are coming.'²

Describing the catastrophic effects of a locust invasion which he himself witnessed near Debaroa (Dabarwa), he relates: 'the sun became yellow, and the shadow of the earth likewise, and all the people were dismayed. Next day it was a thing not to be believed, for they spread over a width of eight leagues.'³ On another occasion, in the country called Abrigima, in Angot, he and his companions 'travelled five days through country entirely

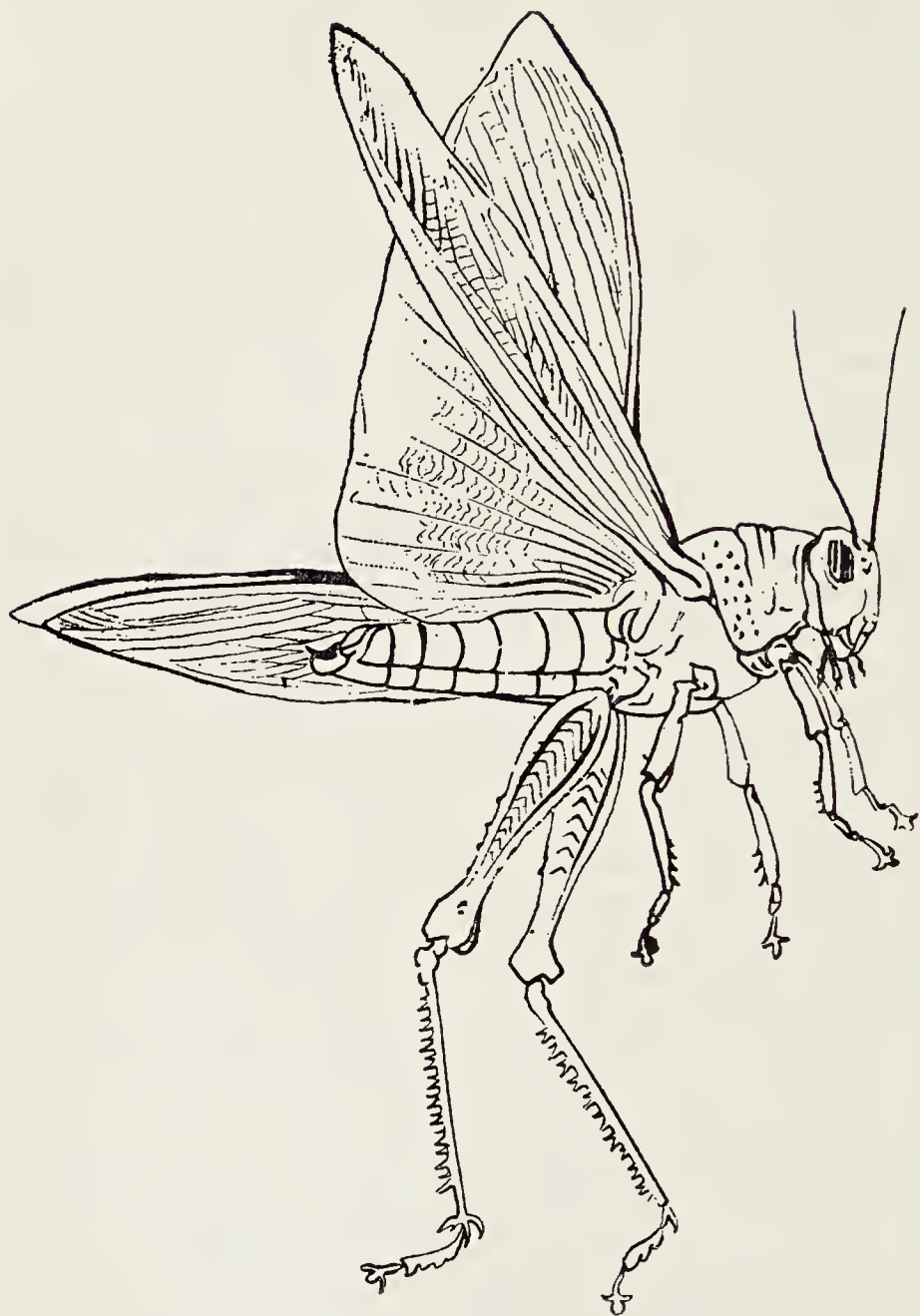
1. Alvarez, pp. 408-9.

2. *ibid.*, pp. 67-8.

3. *ibid.*, p. 68.

depopulated and through maize(?)⁴ canes as thick as canes for propping vines; it cannot be told how they were all cut and bitten, as if bitten by asses, all done by the locusts. The wheat, barley, and *tafo* (tef), as though they had never been sown there, the trees without any leaves, and the tender twigs all eaten; there was no memory of grass of any sort, and if we had not been prepared with mules laden with barley and provisions for ourselves, we and the mules would have perished. This country was entirely covered with locusts without wings, and they said these were the seed of those which had been there and destroyed the country, and they said that as soon as they had wings they would at once go and seek their country. I am silent as to the multitude of those without wings, because it is not to be believed, and it is right that I should relate what I saw in this country. I saw men, women and children, seated horror-struck amongst these locusts. I asked them: "why do you remain there dying? Why do you not kill these animals, and revenge yourselves for the damage which their parents did you, and at least the dead ones will do you no further harm?" They answered that they had not the heart to resist the plague which God gave them for their sins. The people were going away from this country, and we found the roads full of men, women, and children, on foot, and some in their arms, with their little bundles on their heads, removing to a country where they might find provisions; it was a pitiful sight to see them. When we were in this lordship of Abrigima, in a town named Aquate, there came travelling thither such a multitude of locusts as cannot be told, and they began to arrive there one day about the hour of tierce (i.e. 9 a.m.), and till night they did not cease, and as they arrived they settled to rest. Next day, at the hour of prime (i.e. 6 a.m. or sunrise), they began to depart, and at midday there was not one there; and not a leaf remained upon a tree. At that moment others began to arrive, and they remained like the others till next day at the same hour, and these did not leave any crop with a husk, nor a green blade. In this way they did for five days, one after the other; and the people said these were the children going in search of their fathers. They showed the way for the others who had not got wings. After these had passed we learnt the width of the passage of these locusts, and saw the destruction they had caused. The breadth of

4. Probably sorghum.



The locust: a serious scourge.

From H. Salt, *A Voyage to Abyssinia*.

this exceeded three leagues, in which there did not remain a husk or tree, and the country did not look burned, but much snowed with the whiteness of the sticks and the dryness of the grass. God was pleased that the fruits had already been gathered in. We did not know whence they came, because they came from towards the sea of the Kingdom of Dankali which is of hostile Moors; neither did we learn where was the end of their journey'.⁵

The ravages of the locust by no means followed a regular pattern. Swarms varied immensely in size from year to year, while the areas affected seemed to be selected in an entirely haphazard fashion. Pais, for example, says that certain areas might be attacked year after year and then be free from the plague for as much as thirty years. Devastation was, however, generally greatest in the northern provinces, Gojam, Begemder, Dambea, and, above all, Tigre.⁶

The situation in the seventeenth century is referred to by several of the Jesuits, one of whom, Father Lobo, noted with some satisfaction that God, 'who often makes calamities subservient to his will, permitted this very affliction to be the cause of the conversion of so many natives who might otherwise have died in their errors'. Writing of the Maegoga area near Aksum, more frequently referred to by the Portuguese as Fremona, he notes that many people in 1625 were 'forced to leave their habitations and seek the necessities of life in other places'. 'Whenever this plague appears', he adds, 'nothing is seen through the whole region, but the most ghastly consternation, or heard, but the most piercing lamentations; for whenever they fall, they leave not one blade of grass, nor any hopes of a harvest.'⁷ Gaspar Pais says that in the following year 'everything' was destroyed in the Fremona area.⁸ Another Jesuit, Tomasso Barneto, confirms that the locusts arrived in very great numbers and travelled from Maegoga to Maedoro and thence to Abba Garima and Tafazes, and did not depart until they had consumed every grain of food. He adds that a famine ensued which resulted in numerous deaths and conversions to Roman Catholicism, above all at Maedoro.⁹ Continued depredations in Tigre were reported

5. *ibid.*, pp. 71-2.

6. Beccari, Vol. II, p. 251.

7. Lobo, p. 81. *Vide* also Beccari, Vol. VIII, p. 200.

8. *Lettere annue di Ethiopia*, p. 196.

9. Beccari, Vol. XII, pp. 209-10.

by Almeida who records that famine victims included large numbers of children, and that many persons were so weak from hunger that though they went to the priests to confess they were unable to open their mouths.¹⁰

Further attacks by locusts were reported in 1633, 1634 and 1635 by Almeida who indicates that once again the situation was at its worst in Tigre. The province of Bur by the Red Sea was completely devastated; conditions were scarcely better in Hamasien and Agame, and were also very serious in Gojam. In many places not the leaf of a tree nor a blade of grass remained; innumerable cattle and sheep died of starvation and a complete famine followed. Large numbers of people were obliged to abandon their homesteads and seek new lands far and wide.¹¹

Plagues of locusts, as we shall see, are mentioned in the Ethiopian chronicles a century later in 1747 and 1748.¹² Bruce agrees that 'every green thing' was consumed, but suggests that little was heard of this pest during his own residence in the country, i.e. from 1768 to 1773. Ignoring the fact that locust invasions were infrequent and never so severe in the Gondar area where he resided as in the north, he argued that the Jesuits had exaggerated the matter, 'these good fathers' wishing to claim that their 'pretended miracles' had chased the insects away.¹³

The Jesuit writers have more to say than Alvares on the difficulties facing Ethiopian agriculture, not only because they were by nature less complacent, but also because conditions had deteriorated during the intervening period of war. Almeida argues that despite the great abundance, hunger often occurred, through shortages of food in particular regions. There were, he considered, several reasons for this. One was that supplies of grain were used not only for consumption as bread but also for the production of a kind of beer (*talla*) which was drunk in such quantities that he wondered whether more was not drunk than eaten. Another reason was, as we have seen, the plagues of locusts which in some regions, such as Tigre, were frequent and did not leave a single grain of food, the insects even eating away the grass stalks. Yet another explanation was the lawlessness with

10. *ibid.*, Vol. XII, p. 267.

11. *ibid.*, Vol. VI, pp. 503, 519, Vol. VII, p. 342. *Vide* also Vol. VIII, p. 200.

12. Guidi, *Annales Regum Iyasu II et Iyoas*, pp. 150, 154.

13. Bruce, Vol. II, p. 653.

which many troops of soldiers went about the country, plundering, looting, and eating. They were worse than the locusts, Almeida exclaimed, for the latter destroyed what was in the fields, but the former also seized what had been gathered into the houses. His final explanation was that on account of bad roads and the consequent relatively high cost of portage, food was not carried from one district to another, even from a region of plenty to one of acute shortage.¹⁴

Pero Pais completes the picture by describing the great destruction caused to crops in many places by the invasion of innumerable monkeys, as well as by swarms of mice. These latter, he says, were most serious in Wagara, but were also common in all the provinces he had visited, such as Tigre, Begemder, Gojam and Dambea.¹⁵

The learned Ludolphus, who, probably guided by Gregory, was always at pains to point out such defects in the Ethiopian economy as could be improved, also bemoaned the farmers' lack of foresight which may be in part accounted for by the prevailing fear of raids by soldiers, Gallas and robbers. Though 'the Fields were always smiling with a flowery Grace, the Habessines', he wrote, 'neither lay up nor provide against the years ensuing, whether trusting to their Plenty, or destitute of Store-houses. They never stack their Hay; tho for the sake of the Locusts it many times falls out to be very necessary. For that same pestilent Vermin devouring Corn and Grass, occasions frequent Famines destructive to Man and Beast. Gregory, observing afar off certain Cartloads of Hay, compar'd them to Elephants at a distance'.¹⁶

Bruce, writing towards the end of our period told a similar tale, attributing the low crop yields he deplored to the prevalence of rats and mice. Describing Tigre province he declares: 'I apprehend the deficiency of the crop is not from the barrenness of the soil, but from the immense quantity of field-rats and mice that overrun the whole country and live in the fissures of the earth. To kill these they set fire to their straw, the only use they make of it.'¹⁷ Like Pais before him he indicates that these pests were most destructive in Wagara where 'prodigious swarms' of them consumed 'immense quantities' of grain. The province was also 'full of large ants', and, worse still, suffered from 'the greatest

14. Almeida, p. 46.

15. Beccari, Vol. II, p. 234.

16. Ludolphus, pp. 48-9.

17. Bruce, Vol. III, p. 125.

of all plagues', bad government, which, he said, speedily destroyed all the advantages afforded by Nature, climate and situation.¹⁸ Bruce's view of the agricultural situation is thus not unduly enthusiastic: 'With all the advantage of triple harvests which cost no fallowing, weeding, manuring or other expensive process, the farmer, is always poor and miserable.'¹⁹ 'In several villages', he concludes, 'living is very miserable . . . people of consideration scarcely know any other diet than *teff* bread and bouza (beer). Whether this *teff* is white or black is the whole difference between the diet of master and servant.'²⁰

Famine was by no means unknown, the earliest outbreak of which we have knowledge occurring in the first half of the ninth century.²¹ Alvares mentions large numbers of beggars in the region of Aksum,²² while the Chronicles and other sources record serious famines in 1540, 1543, 1567, 1611, 1623, 1634-5, 1650, 1653, 1678, 1700, 1702, 1747, 1748, 1752, 1783, 1789, 1796, 1797 and 1800. The famine of 1540, as we have seen, was declared worse than that which occurred at the time of the destruction of the second temple, while a three-year famine which began in Harar in 1567 led to the decimation of that city.²³ The rains of 1611 were so heavy and the temperature so cold that, according to one Jesuit source, there were extensive crop failures in the northern provinces. After a dying child had appealed to his compatriots to pray to God to save Ethiopia from all storms, the Emperor Susneyos forbade all dances and games during the rainy season, ordering instead ceaseless prayer. The subsequent famine was nonetheless so severe that he was obliged to ask his nobles for supplies of food; hitherto well-to-do people suffered from acute hunger, and the poor were correspondingly worse off. In 1702 starving peasants appealed to the Emperor Iyasu I at Gondar crying that if he could not help them they would die of hunger. Iyasu and some of his nobles were apparently well supplied, for the chronicler of his reign states that together they fed an innumerable number of the destitute for two months; the sovereign, we are told, extended charity to all who were in need and did not say 'this one is a Jew, that one is disloyal, or a murderer'. In 1678 the price of grain in Gojam is said to have

18. *ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 196.

19. *ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 124.

20. Bruce, 3rd ed., Vol. VIII, p. 77.

21. Budge, Vol. I, p. 275.

22. Alvarez, p. 91.

23. Trimingham, p. 94.

risen to one *amole*, or salt bar, per *ladan*,²⁴ and many mules, horses and donkeys perished. The subsequent famines of 1747 and 1748 are expressly attributed to large-scale invasions of locusts which are said to have covered the land like fog, and resulted in a high death rate in both the *daga* and *qolla* areas.²⁵ The famine of 1783 was referred to in the royal chronicles as *gachne*, or 'my sickness', that of 1789 was said to have affected 'all the provinces' of the realm, while that of 1796, which was particularly serious at Gondar, was stated to have been caused by locusts. The sacking of the capital in the following year led to a deterioration of the city when 'more men perished than could be remembered'. In 1800, too, many soldiers died of famine while on campaign.²⁶

24. *Laden*, a grain measure equal to 2 *qunna* or about 2 litres.

25. Conzelman, pp. 123, 138; Beccari, Vol. XI, pp. 288-9; Perruchon, *Règne de Susneyos*, pp. 182, 185; Budge, Vol. II, p. 398; Perruchon, *Règne de Fasiladas*, pp. 85, 89, 91; Guidi, *Annales Iohannis I, Iyasu I et Bakaffa*, p. 231; Guidi, *Annales Regum Iyasu II et Iyoas*, pp. 143, 150, 154, 166; Basset, *Etudes*, p. 313; Bruce, Vol. II, p. 165.

26. Blundell, pp. 321, 411, 440, 468, 447, 492.

Chapter 18

Diseases and Medicines

DISEASE LOOMED large in our period : despite the kindness of the climate the highlands suffered from occasional epidemics of great severity, while the lowlands were in many cases subject to endemic fever.

Documentation for the medical history of the early middle ages is sadly lacking, though some medical historians believe that smallpox was native to Ethiopia and that an epidemic of it in Arabia in A.D. 370 was connected with the movement of Ethiopian soldiers across the Red Sea.¹ As we have seen the outbreak which occurred in South Arabia in 570 or 571 had disastrous results for Abraha's soldiers who were obliged to abandon their attack on Mecca as is recorded in the *Koran's* chapter of the elephant. Smallpox, as we shall see, remained one of the country's most serious diseases throughout our period.

The first epidemic of any kind in Ethiopia itself, for which we have any record seems to have occurred after a famine in the first half of the ninth century.² Half a millennium later the Arab historian Maqrizi mentions an outbreak in 1435-6 which left the land almost empty of inhabitants.³ Francesco Suriano, who visited the country in 1482, and was the first European observer to refer to the health of the Ethiopian people, considered them weak and with little energy, but provides no details save that they were 'always full of lice'.⁴

Our knowledge of the epidemics of later centuries is slightly less meagre as the Ethiopian chronicles – which are largely concerned with the Gondar area – and several foreigners mention some of the worst attacks. An unspecified disease raged in most parts of the country and especially Tigre in 1606, the year before the coming to power of the Emperor Susneyos (1607-32). One of the Jesuits, Aloisius de Azevedo, claimed that though very fatal it spared all Roman Catholics and caused many

1. Zinsser, pp. 88, 91; Barkhuus, p. 719.

2. Budge, Vol. I, p. 275.

3. Gaudefroy-Demombynes, p. 37.

4. *Ethiopian Itineraries*, p. 45.

Right: Water-carrier. More often water was carried by women on their backs, as may be seen in a later plate. (From an eighteenth century MS., British Museum Orient 728.)



Below: Slaughtering cattle. (From an eighteenth century MS., British Museum Orient 590.)





Above: Woman grinding corn with a stone. (From an eighteenth century MS., British Museum Orient 616.)

Below: Monks undertake woman's work. Carrying wood and water and grinding corn. (From an eighteenth century MS., British Museum Orient 737.)



Ethiopians to flee from the infected areas. Two serious misfortunes befell the land during the ensuing reign: a plague called *mantita* which occurred in 1611, and an unidentified epidemic which spread from Sennar to Gorgora and all Ethiopia in 1618 and 1619.⁵ Azevedo says that this second outbreak obliged the Emperor and his courtiers to leave the capital; many nobles and a significant number of the Portuguese perished; priests were too frightened to visit the dying and in some places there were too few survivors to bury the dead.⁶

A further two epidemics broke out in the time of the Emperor Fasiladas (1632–1667); one of *kantara* or *fangel* (cholera), which occurred in 1634, caused those attacked to drop dead suddenly, while the other, called *kabab*, took place in 1653, apparently as a result of famine. Almeida says that the epidemic of 1634 first appeared in Dambea and thence made its way as far as Tigre by way of Dancaz, Wagara, Semien and Lamalmon; in all these provinces the death rate was very high and many people evacuated the areas of worse infection. This practice is confirmed by Ludolphus who says that on the outbreak of a pestilence the people often retired with their cattle to the mountains, ‘putting all their security in flying from the contagion’.⁷ Another plague occurred in Harar about 1567 and resulted in the death among others of its Emir, Nur bin Mujahid.⁸

In the reign of Iyasu I (1682–1706) various other outbreaks are mentioned: an illness called *labalb* in 1683, a kind of influenza in 1685, an unspecified type of sickness which was particularly serious at Aksum in 1693, an illness called *tanaka* at the end of the following year, and an attack of *gudru*(?) in 1701.⁹ The Gallas, Bruce asserts, with what authenticity we cannot tell, had never seen or heard of smallpox until this reign when it met them in the Ethiopian villages and ‘raged among them with such violence that whole provinces conquered by them became half desert’; in many places they were ‘forced to become tri-

5. Beccari, Vol. I, p. 123; *ibid.*, Vol. XI, p. 157.

6. Pereira, pp. 108–9, 156, 479; Perruchon, *Règne de Susneyos*, pp. 182, 185. Beccari, Vol. XI, pp. 416–17.

7. Beccari, Vol. I, p. 158; Perruchon, *Règne de Fasiladas*, pp. 85, 89, 91; Basset, *Etudes*, pp. 307, 313; Budge, Vol. II, pp. 398. *Vide also Lettere Annue de Giapone, China, Goa et Ethiopia*, p. 138; Beccari, Vol. VII, p. 342; Ludolphus, p. 377.

8. Trimmingham, p. 94.

9. Guidi, *Annales Johannis I, Iyasu I et Bakaffa*, pp. 64, 87, 173; Basset, p. 315; Budge, Vol. II, pp. 415–16.

butary to those whom before they kept in continual fear'.¹⁰ A further unidentified epidemic broke out in the coronation year of the Emperor Tewoflos (1708-1711).¹¹ A violent attack of smallpox is recorded for 1718, the second year of the reign of Dawit III (1716-1721) in which many nobles died.¹² During the reign of Iyasu II (1730-1755) many people perished of a fever referred to as *metat* in 1740 and of one called *gunfan*, probably influenza in 1747.¹³ There was also a serious attack of smallpox in 1768, during the reign of Iyoas (1755-1769) which carried off large numbers of persons in Gondar and as far as the frontiers of the realm.¹⁴

This last-mentioned epidemic is described by Bruce who treated some of his victims. He believed that it had started at the coast, killing, so the Naib told him, over one thousand people at Massawa and Arkiko. From there it advanced to Adowa at the time of his arrival in the autumn of 1768 and rapidly spread inland; he found it at Gondar in the spring of the following year. The disease appeared to him 'much more serious and fatal' than in England and he thought that it had resulted in considerable depopulation, particularly among the Shihos and other groups of people near Massawa, and the Shanqellas in the west where it had 'greatly reduced their numbers' and 'extinguished to a man whole tribes of them'.¹⁵

Another unidentified epidemic occurred, according to Bruce, a few years later in 1772 in the camp of the rebel Theodore, thus militating in favour of his defeat by Ras Mikael in one of the battles of Sarbakusa.¹⁶

The usual treatment for smallpox, as in other parts of the East, was, Bruce says, to confine the patient to his room without the smallest breath of air. Hot drinks, extra bed clothing and a fire were also prescribed and the door was securely closed to keep the room in darkness.¹⁷ Another popular cure used in Gondar in his day had been devised by one of the monks of Waldaba; it consisted of writing certain characters on a tin plate which were

10. Bruce, Vol. II, p. 227.

11. Basset, *Études*, p. 330.

12. *ibid.*, p. 339; Budge, Vol. II, p. 441.

13. Guidi, *Annales Regum Iyasu II et Iyoas*, pp. 99, 150.

14. *ibid.*, p. 242.

15. Bruce, Vol. III, pp. 209-11, 68, 178, 311; Vol. II, p. 458.

16. *ibid.*, Vol. IV, pp. 146, 197.

17. *ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 211.

then washed off with a medicinal liquor and given to the patient to drink.¹⁸ The Gallas of Maitsha, on the other hand, lived in such terror of the disease, which, however, seldom broke out more frequently than once every fifteen or twenty years, that when infection was identified in a household, the neighbours, knowing it would spread to the whole area if unchecked, surrounded the house in the night and set fire to it. They then thrust the inmates back into the burning dwelling at the point of their spears even though they were their neighbours and relatives. Bruce's comment was that though in Europe this practice might seem 'a barbarity scarcely credible' it would be considered 'quite otherwise' if one saw the 'dreadful visitation' of the disease; even the plague, he added, had 'nothing in it so terrible'.¹⁹

Malaria and other fevers were widespread in the lowlands, particularly after the rains, as is noted by Alvares and most other observers.²⁰ An anonymous Portuguese report, which was probably exaggerated, states that no fewer than four thousand one hundred people died of fever at Massawa in 1541, the year of da Gama's landing. The majority of the victims were poor inhabitants and Indian sailors, though a considerable number of the Portuguese also perished.²¹ The situation after the rains was also serious in other areas. Thus Lobo, writing of Fremona in Tigre, observed that as soon as the rains began the air became 'unwholesome' and prone to 'numberless diseases', while Pero Pais says that many people always died at this time in Begemder and Wagara.²² Bruce, an able witness, remarks that after the rains the 'sickly season begins in the low country'.²³ He notes in his *Travels* that Massawa, like the whole Red Sea area between the tropics, was 'very unwholesome' and that many people there suffered from 'violent fevers' locally known as *nidad*. These were generally fatal after three days, though if the patient survived till the fifth day he often recovered, provided that he drank plenty of water and had it sprinkled over his bed.²⁴ From the falling of the first rains it was 'death' to sleep in the region of the

18. *ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 203, 207.

19. *ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 246-7; cf. Pearce, Vol. I, pp. 10, 90-1, 296-304.

20. Alvarez, p. 164.

21. Beccari, Vol. X, p. 19.

22. Lobo, pp. 80-1; Beccari, Vol. II, p. 247.

23. Bruce, Vol. III, p. 707.

24. *ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 35.

Takaze, all the inhabitants being obliged to retire to the villages on the top of the nearby mountains.²⁵ In Shire, the 'putrid fevers', which were of the 'worst kind', were 'almost constant', and on occasion swept away numerous people daily.²⁶ In Wal-daba, 'violent fevers' reigned 'perpetually'.²⁷ Walqayt was a 'feverish' province and its neighbouring lowlands 'unwholesome', while in Dambea and the Lake Tana area generally the inhabitants suffered from 'malignant fevers'.²⁸ In Ras el Fil to the far west a 'bloody flux' never ceased to rage.²⁹

'Fever', he concludes, 'prevailed in Abyssinia in all low grounds and plains, in the neighbourhood of all rivers which run in valleys; it is really a malignant tertian (malaria), which, however, has so many forms and modes of intermission that it is impossible for one not of the Faculty to describe it. It is not in all places equally dangerous, but on the banks of the Takazee it is particularly fatal. The valley where that river runs is very low and sultry, being full of large trees. In Kuara, too, it is very mortal; in Belessa and Dembea less so; in Walkayt it is dangerous; but not so much in Tzegarde, Kolla, Woggora and Wal-dubba. It does not prevail in high ground or mountains, or in places much exposed to the air. This fever is called Nedad, or burning; it begins always with a shivering and headache, a heavy eye, and inclination to vomit; a violent heat follows, which leaves little intermission, and ends generally in death the third day. In the last stage of the distemper the belly swells and the body within an instant smells most insupportably; to prevent which they bury the corpse immediately after the breath is out, and often within the hour.'³⁰

Dysentery, Almeida states, was also very common in low-lying areas; Bruce says that it often accompanied fevers, and that they were 'always tedious and very frequently proved mortal, especially during the long rains'.³¹

The existence of fever in the lowlands had important economic and political consequences as it prevented the utilization of much agriculturally good land, particularly in the vicinity of rivers and

25. *ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 160.

26. *ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 153.

27. *ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 178.

28. *ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 501, 503; Vol. II, p. 265.

29. *ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 361.

30. *ibid.*, Vol. IV, p. 22.

31. Beccari, Vol. V, p. 70; Bruce, Vol III, p. 25.

lakes, and made the highlanders reluctant to tarry unnecessarily in fever areas which were nevertheless of strategic importance. Fever indeed left its mark on history. Amda Tseyon (1314-1344), for example, is said to have been taken ill of fever during his campaigns in the lowlands against the inhabitants of Adal and was near to being defeated as a result; his soldiers, Bruce tells us, were most reluctant to remain in the area.³² Minas (1559-1563), who was less fortunate, died of fever caught during a disastrous expedition in the lowlands south of Shoa.³³ In less gruesome vein it may be recalled that Bakaffa (1721-1730) selected as Empress, Wallata Giyorgis, the girl who had nursed him when he fell sick of a fever acquired in Kuara, the low-lying province on the borders of Sennar.³⁴ In establishing themselves on relatively high land at Gorgora the Portuguese, according to Bruce, chose one of the few spots on Lake Tana which were free from fever.³⁵

Leprosy, as in later times, tended to be largely confined to particular areas of the north and west. Thus Alvares states there were 'many lepers' in Tigre. They were not segregated, but were looked after by 'many people, who, out of devotion, wash them and tend their sores with their hands'.³⁶ This of course applied exclusively to the Christian population, for the Muslims following the instructions of the prophet, doubtless practiced segregation. Alvares estimates that in the vicinity of Aksum he had seen no fewer than three thousand cripples, blind men and lepers.³⁷ Bruce also refers to a concentration of the disease in the Gondar area.³⁸

A certain prevalence of eye diseases in Tigre is mentioned by one of the Jesuits, Aloisius de Azevedo who states, however, that they were easily curable.³⁹

There is some reason to suppose that syphilis, which probably originated in the New World and was destined to become very serious in northern Ethiopia, may have been introduced by the Portuguese in the middle of the sixteenth century, as is argued by Dr. Arne Barkhuus, sometime member of the United States Technical Mission to Ethiopia.⁴⁰ Though not mentioned by name it appears to have been seen by Bruce who refers to a disease

32. Bruce, Vol. III, p. 13-14, 28, 34, 37.

33. *ibid.*, 211.

34. *ibid.*, Vol II, p. 598.

35. *ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 265; Vol. III, p. 503.

40. Barkhuus, p. 714. *Vide* also Zinsser, p. 53.

36. Alvarez, p. 408.

37. *ibid.*, p. 89.

38. Bruce, Vol. III, p. 419.

39. Beccari, Vol. XI, p. 84.

called *hanzeer*, probably late syphilis or tuberculosis, which took the form of a swelling in the throat glands and under the arms. Fairly similar to it, perhaps also late syphilis, was a disease with a 'very terrible' appearance which was characterized by 'small tubercules'⁴¹ or swellings all over the body, especially on the thighs, arms and legs. These symptoms were often accompanied by ulcers in the nose and mouth which, when squeezed, yielded blood; in other respects the patient did not suffer, except for the pain produced by the ulcers and a general state of uneasiness.⁴² Both these diseases responded to mercurial treatment; the first was slow to cure, but the latter seemed to yield easily to antimonials.

Another widespread complaint was called *farenteit*, or worm of Pharaoh, and afflicted persons who drank stagnant water. The worm in question (later known as the Guinea worm) was a parasite living in the body; it had a white silky texture and a black head with a hooked beak of whitish colour which could be distinctly seen below the skin. It appeared indiscriminately in every part of the body, but most frequently in the legs and arms. The traditional cure was to seize it by the head and wrap it round a thin piece of silk or feather, each day more of its body being pulled out and wound round the thread or quill till the whole, often as long as five feet, was extracted.⁴³

Finally, Bruce mentions elephantiasis, which he calls the 'most terrible malady that could befall the lot of man'; it resulted in the familiar swelling of the legs which became as thick at the ankle as at the knee, being gathered into circular wrinkles like small hoops with raw flesh and oozing lymph between them.⁴⁴

The eating of raw meat had unfortunate effects on a large section of the Ethiopian population. Almeida, who is the first observer to mention the fact, says that as a result of this diet tapeworm was prevalent; the people, except those who abstained from raw meat, were obliged to take frequent doses of a bitter drug called *kosso* made from the flower of a tree growing at high altitudes in many parts of the country.⁴⁵ This drug, Pero Pais observed, was so strong that overdoses were liable to have serious consequences.⁴⁶ Though it is unknown when the practice of

41. Bruce, Vol. III, p. 36.

43. *ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 38.

42. *ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 38.

44. *ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 41.

45. Almeida, p. 98. *Vide* also Beccari, Vol. IV, p. 56.

46. Beccari, Vol. II, pp. 223-4.

taking *kosso* started, it is said that the Gallas adopted it soon after their incursion into the lands formerly ruled by the emperor. According to Bahrey's *History* they began using it during the period of Bifole, their fourth *luba* (1546-1554).⁴⁷

The prevalence of tapeworm and the consequent widespread drinking of *kosso* is also referred to by Bruce towards the end of the eighteenth century. 'The Abyssinians of both sexes and all ages', he states, 'are troubled with a terrible disease, which custom however has enabled them to bear with a kind of indifference. Every individual, once a month, evacuates a large quantity of worms . . . the method of promoting these evacuations, is by infusing a handful of dry *Cusso* (*kosso*) flowers into about two English quarts of *bouza*, or the drink they make from *teff*; after it has been steeped all night, the next morning it is fit for use. During the time the Patient is taking the *Cusso*, he makes a point of being invisible to all his friends, and continues at home from morning till night.' The *kosso* tree, he added, was 'one of the most beautiful trees' and was always planted near churches, among the cedars which surround them, for the use of the town or village. It was even said that the absence of this tree in other countries prevented Ethiopians from travelling abroad. Confident that 'the superior skill' of British physicians could turn it to the advantage of mankind in general he called this tree *Banksia Abissinica* after Sir Joseph Banks the President of the Royal Society.⁴⁸

The other medicines employed in our period were also the subject of some inquiry. Alvares briefly remarks: 'There is no manner of physic, only they apply fire; in some sickness they use cupping without fire, and for headaches, they bleed on the head with a knife so that it should draw blood, and also they use some herbs as a beverage to cure themselves.'⁴⁹ Brother Raphael of Angot, on the other hand, told Zorzi that his country possessed doctors and astrologers for divination, as well as 'herbs, roots and excellent gums for curing sickness'.⁵⁰

A century later Almeida mentions the existence of 'many purgative herbs', which the Portuguese had used to make 'good pills', as well as a large number of plants which were known to

47. *Some Records of Ethiopia*, p. 116.

48. Bruce, Vol. V, pp. 73-6; *vide* also Vol. III, p. 314.

49. Alvarez, pp. 164, 403.

50. *Ethiopian Itineraries*, p. 145.

heal wounds. One called *amadmagdo* (*amadmado*, a plant resembling marshmallow) was said to draw out bones that had been broken by a blow and had remained inside, while another, called *assazoe* (doubtless *esa-zawe*, a plant with fruit in clusters like cherries) was popularly believed to be so effective against snake poison that if a reptile so much as touched it or fell under its shadow it became bemused or stunned.⁵¹ Ludolphus, who accepts the above statements without hesitation, says that Gregory had told him that the oil of garden saffron, which he called *denguelet*(?)⁵² 'was used as a cure for 'hypocondriacal evil' and 'obstruction of the spleen'.⁵³ Pero Pais mentions a tree called *quinda*(?) growing in the lowlands, the roots and leaves of which were used in the cure of carbuncles.⁵⁴

Barradas also refers to several other plants used in medicine, including a tree called *inkoy*⁵⁵ from which a purgative was made,⁵⁶ *decuma*⁵⁷ which was used in the treatment of an unspecified fatal disease, and *waginos*⁵⁸ the leaves of which also had medicinal properties. Bruce, to whom this last-mentioned shrub owes its scientific name, says it grew in many areas of the country, especially in the lowlands, and served as a specific for dysentery both in Ethiopia and Sennar. While in the frontier province of Kuara he himself took the treatment which consisted of one heaped teaspoonful of the crushed bark in a cup of camel's milk twice a day.⁵⁹

Counter-irritants were also often used. Ludolphus, for example, says that jaundice was treated 'by applying a hot burning iron in manner of a Semicircle, toward the upper part of the arm, laying a little cotton upon the wound that the humour may issue forth so long as the disease remains'.⁶⁰

The value of the numerous hot springs was also recognized for people and cattle alike.⁶¹ The royal chronicles of the eight-

51. Almeida, p. 47.

52. Probably *Carthamus tinctorius*.

53. Ludolphus, p. 49.

54. Beccari, Vol. II, p. 224.

55. *Ximenia americana*, Lobo 120; Mérah, pp. 73-4.

56. *ibid.*, Vol. IV, p. 200.

57. *Syzygium guineense*.

58. *Brucea antidysenterica*, known in Gallinya as *abalo*, Beccari, Vol. IV, pp. 193-4, 209.

59. Bruce, Vol. V, pp. 70-1.

60. Ludolphus, p. 377.

61. Beccari, Vol. IV, pp. 90-1; Vol. II, p. 247; Vol. VII, pp. 250-2.

teenth century tell of two sovereigns visiting thermal baths in the Gondar area which are referred to by the Tigrinya word *labati*, while Bruce says that many lepers went to hot springs once or twice a year.⁶²

Medicine, it may be added, was not clearly differentiated from magic, divination and prophecy. It was in the hands partly of ecclesiastics and partly of lay practitioners. Thus Azevedo describes the monks of Debra Damo as active in this field, while Ludolphus, who considered the Ethiopian 'manner of Administering Physick most Deplorable', remarks that 'in most Distempers every Person is his own Physician, and uses such herbs as he has learnt were useful from his Parents'.⁶³ Bruce was also somewhat critical, declaring that the monks of Maguena, west of Gondar, were 'all prophets and diviners' and employed 'fanatical inventions and pretended visions' instead of a real knowledge. Geez and Amharic manuscripts containing traditional prescriptions, however, are extant which date back at least to the end of our period and indicate that many cures were by no means without scientific basis. Such works, which can be more conveniently discussed in treating the medical situation in the nineteenth century, indicate that Ethiopian medicine was essentially native in origin, though at least one manuscript, now housed in the British Museum, is largely derived from Arab and Syrian sources.⁶⁴

Epidemics left a strong imprint on economic and social life. The chronicle of Zara Yagob, for example, describes a serious plague in which so many people died at Debra Berham, the capital, that 'no one was left to bury the dead'. The pious king built a church, Beta Qirqos, as it was said that there would be no plague, drought or death near a shrine. It is claimed that this drove the epidemic from the palace. He then ordered his subjects to assemble with sticks, branches and holy water to bury the dead. He called these bands Congregations of the Gospel, and the sticks Sticks of Moses. To ensure obedience he also ordered his chiefs to pillage the houses and seize the goods of all who failed to obey.⁶⁵

62. Blundell, pp. 437, 482; Bruce, Vol. III, p. 419.

63. Beccari, Vol. XI, p. 128; Ludolphus, p. 377.

64. Bruce, Vol. IV, pp. 288; Vol. III, pp. 203, 207. Budge, Vol. II, p. 574.

65. Perruchon, *Les Chroniques de Zara Yaeqob et de Baeda Maryam*, pp. 73-4, 93-4.

Chapter 19

Food and Drink

DESCRIBING other aspects of Ethiopian social life¹ Alvares declares that people did not use tables, but ate on 'flat trenchers, like trays of great width, without napkins or tablecloths'. He is presumably referring to the *masob*, the traditional round basket table, the upper part of which resembles a flat tray, and contains the round pancake-like bread called *injera*. The Ethiopians, he continues, had 'basins of very black earthenware² like jet, and pipkins of the same clay for drinking water and wine'. Many ate raw meat, while others ate it roasted.³ The practice of eating raw meat had earlier been referred to by the Arab historian, Maqrizi, who states that an eye-witness had told him that he had seen it eaten by the Emperor Dawit I (1382-1411)⁴ Alvares mentions a type of oil, called *hena*,⁵ which was made from a plant like may-weed; it had no taste, but was 'as beautiful as gold'. The feast might be illuminated by the light of tapers made not from tallow but from the country's abundant supply of wax.⁶

The fasts of the Ethiopian Christians were much stricter than those of the Roman Catholics, though probably less extreme than a century or so later. Alvares, who appreciated the good things in life, was surprised by their severity. He noted that Lent began ten days earlier than in Europe and that there were other important fasts, notably that of Nineveh, which covered three days a fortnight before Lent, and the fast of Advent which comprised no less than forty days before Christmas. During such fasts most people ate little more than bread and water, for though they might wish to eat fish, for the greater part it was not avail-

1. For an account of marriage customs at this time, *vide* Alvarez, p. 47.

2. *Vide* also Gaudefroy-Demombynes, p. 29.

3. These statements, it will be noted, run counter to the idea that the practice of eating meat raw began at the time of Ahmad Grañ when the Ethiopians were unable to light fires lest this draw attention to their positions. Cf. De Cosson, Vol. II, p. 312. *Vide* also Gabre Sellassie, pp. 597-8.

4. Gaudefroy-Demombynes, p. 35.

5. *Hina* (Amharic and Tigrinya), the oil of which is used as a cosmetic.

6. Alvarez, p. 403.

able and vegetables were not widely grown. In most parts of the empire such fasts were kept 'by great and small, men and women, boys and girls', but in Tigre and the country of the Bahrnagash meat was eaten on the Saturdays and Sundays of Lent on which two days 'they kill more cows than in all the year'.⁷ Ludolphus confirms that meat was eaten on Sundays during Lent, but emphasized that this period lasted for no less than fifty days. Observing that as in the other eastern churches people abstained from flesh every Wednesday and Friday, he concludes that 'fasting days were more exactly observed' and were kept 'both by healthy and sick people, most exactly and religiously'.⁸ Barradas also notes that fasts were kept with great rigour, no exception being made for travellers, labourers, or invalids. It was normal, he says, not to touch a bite of food or a drop of water in Lent until sunset, or on Wednesdays and Fridays until three or four o'clock in the afternoon, the practice in the absence of better time-pieces being to wait until a man's shadow became seven or nine feet long.⁹ Susneyos, it may be added, was so impressed by the resolution with which the people clung to the Wednesday fast, that toward the end of his reign he expressed his willingness to allow it to be observed by his soldiers who were otherwise supposed to have embraced the Roman Catholic faith.¹⁰

Alvares says that in most monasteries the friars ate a type of cabbage called *orto*(?), and, where they grew, grapes, peaches, mustard called *cenafiche* (*senafich*), linseed and a kind of cardamine seed called *canfa*(?); out of these two last-mentioned seeds they made a hot sauce called *tebba*(?) in which they soaked their bread. These sauces were the normal food during Lent, when the inhabitants abstained not only from meat and eggs but also from butter and milk. The most usual drink, he added, was called *canha*;¹¹ it was a beverage brewed from barley, though it was sometimes made from maize(?), another grain called *guza* (evidently *dagusa* or finger millet), or a kind of grass resembling darnel.¹²

7. *ibid.*, pp. 284-5, 290.

8. Ludolphus, pp. 300-1.

9. Beccari, Vol. IV, p. 174.

10. Bruce, Vol. II, p. 388.

11. Probably a corruption of *siwa* (beer), or a confusion with *chanqa talla*, beer paid as tax.

12. Alvarez, p. 285.

Jerome Lobo and Almeida both contribute further information about eating and drinking in Ethiopia. 'The great lords, and even the Emperor himself,' writes Lobo, 'maintain their tables with no great expense. The vessels they make use of are black earthenware, which, the older it is, they set a greater value on. Their way of dressing their meat, an European, till he hath been long accustomed to it, can hardly be persuaded to like: everything they eat smells strong, and swims with butter. They make no use of either linen or plates. The persons of rank never touch what they eat, but have their meat cut by their pages, and put into their mouths. When they feast a friend, they kill an ox, and set immediately a quarter of him upon the table (for their most elegant treat is raw beef, newly killed, with pepper and salt; the gall of the ox serves them for oil and vinegar). Some, to heighten the delicacy of the entertainment, add a kind of sauce, which they call *Manat* (probably *hamot*), made of what they take out of the guts of the ox. This they set on the fire, with butter, salt, pepper and onion. Raw beef thus relished is their nicest dish, and is eaten by them with the same appetite and pleasure as we eat the best partridges.'¹³

'As they ordinarily sit on the ground,' Almeida confirms, 'the great nobles on carpets and the rest on mats, their tables (evidently *masobs*) are all low and round. They have neither tablecloths nor napkins on them. They wipe their hands on the *apas* (*injera*) they eat, the table is full of them in houses where there are plenty. They put the food on them, without using plates, if it is raw or roast meat. If it is a stew of chicken or mutton or their staple fare, which is a kind of thin pap in which they moisten their *apas*, made from the meal of different pulses, such as lentils, chickpeas, linseed and others peculiar to this country, all this comes in bowls of black clay. This is the dinner service of poor and rich so that down to our own times nothing better was seen even on the table of the Emperor himself. Two or three years ago, however, he ordered a dozen silver plates to be made and he sometimes uses them. One viceroy, the richest man there is today, has made as many more. The bowls come in covered with *Escambias*.¹⁴ This is what they call some things like caps or hats of fine straw, like the straw of the straw hats of the Melinde coast, which they put on top.

13. Lobo, pp. 71-2.

14. *Waskambya* in Amharic.

'Beef they eat raw, calling it *Berindo*¹⁵ and it is the food they esteem most highly. They put a great deal of salt and pepper on it, if they have the pepper, and the most important people who can have the gall of the animal that is killed, squeeze it by hitting it often on the piece in front of them so that the meat should soak it up well; they claim that it gives a great relish. This is their mustard, though mustard itself is found in the country. They make another more peculiar dish from the soft matter inside certain thin entrails¹⁶ with their salt and pepper. It is a dish for princes and they would not abandon it for any other.'¹⁷

Discussing the preparation of food Almeida continues: 'Simple as this food seems it is no small labour to prepare it in Ethiopia, principally because they have no mills to grind the meal. It is all ground by hand and it is women's work; men, even slaves, would not grind it at any price. The grindstones are big stones, the lower wide and the upper nearly round and easily handled. A woman grinds every day enough for forty or fifty *apas*. These have to be made daily because on the second day they are already unfit to eat. Grinding meal and making *apas*, grinding more for the *sava* or beer they drink (which uses up a great deal of meal) and making that, all this is work that calls for many slave women, and plenty of firewood and is very great drudgery. These are the mills about which someone else said, as a proof of his grandeur, that the Emperor took five hundred of them with his army. It was very much an understatement for he could have well said three thousand.'¹⁸ The way the *injera* was prepared was later described by Bruce who tells how the flour was mixed with water in a broad earthenware jug and left until it had somewhat fermented. It was then poured into a flat earthenware receptacle and cooked over the fire to produce a thin circular cake or pancake about two feet in diameter. These cakes, which were of a 'spongy soft quality', were, he considered, 'of a not disagreeable sourish taste'.¹⁹

The manner in which mead, or *taj*, the national drink, was produced was also explained by Almeida: 'Five or six parts of

15. *Berendo* or raw meat. *Vide* also Beccari, Vol. IV, p. 165; Vol. VIII, p. 46.

16. Apparently prepared from parts of the *chagwara*, or stomach, and including such items as tripe and liver.

17. Almeida, pp. 62-4.

18. *ibid.*, p. 64.

19. Bruce, Vol. V, p. 77.

water and one of honey', he says, 'are put into a pot with a handful of toasted barley which makes it ferment. Afterwards they add some morsels of a certain wood they call *Sado*²⁰ which draws out the sweetness, and in five or six days it is ready to drink. It has not the taste of our grape wine but its wholesomeness gives it an advantage. These people have one great vice which is that they are much addicted to wine. They do not drink while eating but when the table is cleared the *caloes* are brought into the house and neighbours or friends assemble. In noblemen's houses and in the Emperor's, many guests are always invited. There is no conversation without the wine circulating and being drunk in turns until either they are laid out on the spot or else withdraw so much warmed up that they cannot easily find the door. They achieve this by drinking to such excess that no one knows how they can hold so much. The wine is really very mild, and if it were drunk in moderation no harm could be done.'²¹

'The common drink of the Abyssinians,' Lobo agrees, 'is beer and mead, which they drink to excess, when they visit one another; nor can there be a greater offence against good manners than to let the guests go away sober.. Their liquor is always presented by a servant, who drinks first himself, and then gives the cup to the company, in order of their quality.'²²

20. *Tsaddo* or *Taddo* (Amharic), the shrub *Rhamnus tsaddo*.

21. Almeida, pp. 64-5.

22. Lobo, p. 72.

Chapter 20

Clothing

ETHIOPIAN clothing, which appears to have remained more or less unchanged in its main features throughout this period,¹ accounted then as now for a large proportion of the expenditure of rich and poor alike and was the main item in the country's import list. The type of clothing described in this period was in many ways similar to that seen several centuries later, though there are two differences to observe: The nobility at that time wore colourful robes which contrast with the less vivid appearance of modern Ethiopian dress, while the poorer classes seem to have been more badly dressed than at present, and, doubtless owing to an overall shortage of textiles, often possessed no more than a pair of trousers. Sometimes they could also afford a *shamma*, the kind of toga traditionally worn by the Ethiopian people. Alvares notes, for example, that in Tigre, most of the men wore only short breeches, no more than two spans long, made of cotton cloth or tanned leather, while married women wore 'very little covering' and single women had still 'less shame'.²

Castanhoso, who visited Ethiopia at a time when most of it had been overrun by Grañ, drew a colourful picture of the clothing of the nobility. The Queen, he declares, 'was all covered to the ground with silk', and wore a large flowing cloak. 'Some men bore a silk canopy that covered her and the mule to the ground, with an opening in front for her to see through. She was clothed in very thin white Indian cloth and a burnoose of black satin, with flowers and fringes of very fine gold, like a cloak, her head dressed in the Portuguese manner, and so muffled in a very fine cloth that only her eyes could be seen. The Barnaguais (Bahrnagash), lord of that country, walked on foot naked to the waist, with a lion or tiger's skin on his shoulders as a covering, with the right arm exposed, as he led her by the bridle; for it is the custom, whenever the Preste or his Queen makes a state entry,

1. Gaudefroy-Demombynes, p. 25.

2. Alvarez, pp. 77, 92.

for the lord of the land to lead them by the bridle in the manner I describe, as a sign of submission.'³

'There came also with the Queen,' he continues, 'two lords like marquises, whom they call *Azayes* (*Azajes*), and no one else can wear their uniform in the way they do, and by it they are recognized. This is a . . . tunic of silk garnished with silk of its own colours, reaching to the ground, with a train of two palms behind like a woman's; these tunics laced, and over them cloaks. They accompanied the Queen on one side and the other, near her, with their hands on the mule; the Queen rode on a saddle with a low pommel, with a stirrup for the left foot, and the right leg doubled over the pommel, but so covered with her garments that no one could see the manner of her sitting, and her ladies all riding properly on mules muffled in their cloaks.'⁴

The queen's commander was also dressed in costly material. He was 'clothed in hose and vest of red satin and gold brocade with many plaits, and a French cape of fine black cloth all quilted with gold, and a black cap with a very rich medal, the captains and *fidalgos*⁵ and others with the best equipments they had, which were very fine'. The army carried 'banners of blue and white damask with red crosses, and the royal standard of crimson and white damask, with the cross of Christ'.⁶

The situation in Father Lobo's time was similar. The 'meaner sort of people', he declares, dressed in 'very plain' clothes, often only wearing a pair of trousers and a thick garment of cotton that covered their bodies, but the people of quality, especially at court, ran to the opposite extreme, and 'ruined themselves with costly habits'. They wore, he said, 'all sorts of silks, and particularly the fine velvets of Turkey'.

'They love bright and glaring colours, and dress themselves much in the Turkish manner, except that their clothes are wider, and their drawers cover their legs. Their robes are always full of gold and silver embroidery. . . .

'The ladies' dress is yet more magnificent and expensive; their robes are as large as those of the religious of the order of St. Bernard. They have various ways of dressing their heads, and spare no expense in ear-rings, necklaces, or any thing that may contribute to set them off to advantage. Besides their cloaths,

3. Whiteway, p. 18.

4. *ibid.*, pp. 17-19.

5. nobles, in Portuguese.

6. *ibid.*, p. 17.

they are not much reserved or confined, and have so much liberty in visiting one another, that their husbands often suffer by it. Besides their cloaths, the Abyssins have no moveables or furniture of much value, nor doth their manner of living admit of them.⁷

Almeida confirms and elaborates the above description. 'Less than fifty years ago', he states, 'no one but the King and a close relative or favourite of his was allowed to wear anything but breeches and a piece of cloth with which they cloak themselves, and which is like a cape and at night is used as a sheet and blanket.' This remained the dress of the ordinary people, whose breeches were made of thick native cotton cloth, or, in the case of those slightly better off, of black or red Cambay cloth called buckram. These clothes were, like old slops, as wide at the bottom as at the top and very badly gathered. The rich had come to prefer to wear a coat called *camizas* (*qamis*) which was somewhat like the Indian *cabayas* and was normally made of Indian *bofetas* (*bufeta*), or fustian, or of a blue cloth, both of which came from Cambay. It was not open all the way down like its Indian equivalent, but only to the waist and held in by tiny buttons; it had a small collar and very long narrow sleeves which lay on the arm as if folded. Over this garment it was customary to wear a 'fine local cloth', evidently a *shamma*. Some of the lords and richer men, on the other hand, wore shirts of taffeta, satin or damask, and Turkish coats of velvet or Mecca brocade, in which case they did not cloak themselves with pieces of cloth any more than the Turks did. The nobles wore Moorish style breeches which came down to the foot, narrow and in folds. From the knee downwards they were made of damask and velvet, but from there upwards, they were of linen as they were covered by the *cabaya*; even the Emperor thought it a waste to wear silk under the *cabaya* though the linen sometimes showed when one sat down.⁸ The people who dressed most luxuriously were the viceroys and nobles at the Emperor's court who adopted the Turkish manner of dress. On top of this elaborate costume they adorned themselves with bracelets round their arms and long gold chains wound round their necks; they carried very large swords, the scabbards of which were encrusted with silver,

7. Lobo, pp. 72-3.

8. *Vide* also Ludolphus, p. 388.

and wore girdles or sashes decorated with very big pieces of gold, so that the court, when in festival, was brilliant and sumptuous.⁹

The women wore something like a smock which was so low that it dragged a great deal on the ground and seemed to Almeida to resemble a sack with sleeves. It was very wide, and would be tied at the waist with a sash with the result that it bulged there like a great bosom. It was customary also for the women to wrap themselves in a 'piece of cloth' (*shamma*), though those who could not afford both wore one or other, the poorest using only dressed ox skins or even skins with the hair on, which were merely tanned till they were soft. This costume was generally worn by the women of Gojam and Dambea even when they were not very poor, whereas it was more usual in Tigre to have something like shawls of sheep's wool or goat's hair, but so badly tanned and cured that it was more like hair than wool. Ladies of higher rank wore smocks of *bofeta* or of silk with underclothes of white cloth. Over their smocks they cloaked themselves with *bofetas* or with silk cloths like the men. Since these dresses were all very wide and long they were 'well wrapped up' if not well dressed, for elegance, the Jesuit concludes, seemed to consist in wearing a great deal of cloth and silk rather than in paying attention to cut and design.¹⁰

Father Baltazar Telles, summing up the dress of the country, declares: 'the best Apparel of People of Quality consists of Vests of several sorts of Silk, as Velvet, Satin, Brocade of Mecca all after the Turkish fashion. The Apparel of the common Sort consists of Callicoes, Buckrams and other Indian Stuffs. The richest, over their Silks, have large Gold Chains, rich Sashes, and curious gold Bracelets, broad Swords, or Hangers plated with Gold and Silver. The Gentlemen were well mounted and accounted the rising parts of their Saddles higher than ours and plated with Silver or Silk of several Colours.'¹¹

Zorzi's Ethiopian ecclesiastics who say nothing of their compatriots' dress do, however, mention their hair-style. Brother Raphael says that they wore their hair long 'like Italians'; Brother Thomas, the Franciscan, notes that men's hair was long, but cut in the shape of a hat; he adds that it was drawn out and

9. Almeida, pp. 58-60, 61-2. ,

10. *ibid.*, pp. 60-1.

11. Telles, p. 232. *Vide* also Beccari, Vol. IV, pp. 145-6; Vol. II, 196-9.

oiled with a mixture of herbs so as to stand on end. It was then combed with a 'long and rather twisted iron' so that it stood out like a hat.¹²

Lobo and Almeida both confirm that the Ethiopians prided themselves highly on the appearance of their hair and had many ways of dressing it. Lobo says that they were 'most exact about their hair' which was 'long and twisted'; though they went bare-headed whilst they were young, they often wore red caps, and sometimes turbans after the Turkish fashion in middle and old age.¹³ Almeida adds that the women soaked their hair in unrefined butter, which gave an 'odd perfume', and generally left it loose, lifting some of it on to the head and allowing the rest to hang down over the neck in little plaits. The menfolk, he said, were 'worse' than the women, having more hair styles and spending more time in contriving them. They arranged their hair 'every day and every hour. . . . Now they leave it like a thicket or tangle . . . now they make it into little horns, now into ribbons, now into sprays, and so on in as many fashions as idleness teaches them, for as they usually have nothing to do they waste a large part of the day in this'. Men of more advanced age cut or shaved their hair and wore red caps like those of priests – a practice which, he thought, they had copied from the Portuguese. The rich had these caps worked in silk or gold by Turkish tailors, who were few in number but the only ones in the land, clothes being normally so simply made, that it was customary for each family to make what it wore.¹⁴

Traditionally, Almeida noted, most Ethiopians slept on a skin which served as a mattress, using for a bolster a small wooden device shaped like a fork on which they rested not the head, which was in mid air, but their neck. The more sophisticated classes, however, had a kind of truckle bed called *catere* fastened with leather straps, on which a skin would be stretched; the richest nobles and princes had a few imported coverlets of printed calico which were trimmed with dimity and edged with silk. A man with two or three of these coverlets would normally have his bed in the reception hall, in full view, the *cateres* being normally also used as seats.

12. *Ethiopian Itineraries*, pp. 143, 171.

13. Lobo, pp. 72–3.

14. Almeida, p. 61.

The Emperor Susneyos (1607–1632), on the other hand, slept on a gilded and very handsome bed which the Portuguese had brought him from China and which he had decorated with rich hangings, coverlets and blankets from Diu, Cambay, Bengal and China, as well as cushions of velvet and cloth of gold. Beside it he had placed beautiful screens and precious carpets. Almeida added that Ras Seela Kristos and Prince Fasiladas also possessed gilded beds from China, as well as silk canopies and hangings.¹⁵

Neither Poncet nor Bruce add much to the descriptions of Ethiopian clothing given by the earlier writers and it may perhaps be assumed that little change had occurred in this sphere. Poncet, for example, observed that ‘the habit of persons of quality’ was a vest of silk or fine cotton cloth, with a sort of ‘scarf’, evidently a *shamma*. The ‘citizens’, he said, were ‘clad in the same manner’, with the difference that they wore no silk and that the cotton they made use of was not so fine, while the ‘common people’, had nothing but a pair of drawers of cotton and a scarf, or *shamma*, which covered the rest of the body.¹⁶

Bruce is the first writer to discuss the actual method of manufacturing clothing in any detail. ‘They tan hides to great perfection in Tigre’ he says. ‘They take off the hair with the juice of two plants, a species of solanum and the juice of the Kol-qual (*qulqual*);¹⁷ both these are produced in abundance in the province. They are great novices, however, in dying; the plant called *suf*¹⁸ produces the only colour they have which is yellow. In order to obtain a blue to weave as a border to their cotton clothes, they unravel the blue threads of the *Marowti*, or blue cotton cloth of Surat, and then weave them again with the thread which they have dyed with the *suf*.’¹⁹

‘The principal part of the dress of the natives’, he reiterates in one of his notebooks, ‘is a large cotton cloth, twenty-four peek (cubits) in length, and one and a half in breadth, with a blue and yellow stripe round the bottom of it. . . . The best for ordinary wear costs ten salts, or one and a half *patata*, about six shillings and sixpence English. It is called Kuara, as probably coming from that province. They are very beautiful and light. The other

15. *ibid.*, p. 59.

16. Poncet, p. 130. *Vide* also Peiser, p. 39; Blundell, p. 214.

17. *Euphorbia candelabrum*.

18. Safflower, or *Carthamus tinctorius*. *Vide* also Peiser, p. 51.

19. Bruce, Vol. III, pp. 125–6; Vol. V, p. 43.

pieces of dress are breeches, which reach to their mid-thighs; and girt with a white girdle of cloth to the common people; but the better sort have red Indian cotton cloths for breeches; and silk, or worsted coloured girdles from the Levant.²⁰

20. *ibid.*, 3rd ed., Vol. VII, pp. 77-8.

Chapter 21

Currency

BARTER WAS widely practised at this time in most parts of Ethiopia. Ibn Fadl Allah, writing in the fourteenth century, states that it was invariably used in the Muslim sultanates of Bali and Dara,¹ while the Ramusio text of Alvares observes that it was equally common in the Christian highlands; the Portuguese noticed that the people did not talk much, but agreed quickly – ‘a thing that surprised us’.²

An unchanging feature of Ethiopian economy since the decline of the Aksumite Empire was the absence of coined money, and the use of gold, salt and iron as the principal means of exchange. Of these three commodities, which had been referred to by Cosmos over a thousand years earlier, gold was the most important and the only one to be mentioned by any of Zorzi’s informants. Brother Thomas of Angot says that though there was no currency, small pieces of refined gold served to a certain extent as a substitute.³ They were of course mainly employed in large transactions and were measured by weight, the unit principally used being the *oquea*, roughly an ounce, the weight of ten *cruzados* or the equivalent of ten to twelve *drams*.⁴ ‘The value of the drachm’, the Ramusio text of Alvares remarks, ‘is according to its value in the Kingdom of Portugal or in India. It is worth three-quarters of a gold ducat in gold, so an ounce is worth seven and a half ducats in gold’.

No changes in the supply or value of gold can be discerned during this period in the Ethiopian empire proper, though it appears that variations occurred at Harar during the period of Grañ’s devastating war. The invader and his men are said to have brought back so much booty to the city that in 1532 every customer was obliged to go to market with a handful of gold; for

1. Gaudefroy-Demombynes, pp. 18–19.

2. See note 1 on p. 137.

3. *Ethiopian Itineraries*, p. 169.

4. Alvarez, pp. 60–61.

the cost of a mule, for example, had risen to forty ounces of the hitherto rare metal.⁵

The weighing of the gold often presented some difficulty and opened the way to obvious abuses with the result that, according to Alvares, the Bahrnagash forbade the people in his country to use any other weights than his own. They had to ask him or his factors for these weights whenever they sold or received gold in order that he might know how much there was in the area under his control.⁶ Despite such precautions Ludolphus observed that the Ethiopians were 'many times gull'd by forraign Merchants, who frequently deny the Gold to be pure; and therefore change it for the meanest of their Commodities'.⁷ Poncet, writing of the end of the seventeenth century, confirmed that gold was widely used, though it was 'not stamp'd with the prince's image as in Europe', but circulated in wedges, cut as required in units from an ounce to half a *dram*. As a safeguard against adulteration there were many goldsmiths who made 'trial of its goodness'.⁸

Throughout this period salt was also an important medium of exchange. Alvares declared that it was used as money throughout 'the Kingdoms and dominions of Prester John', as well as 'in the Kingdoms of the Moors and Gentiles as far as Manicongo',⁹ being so widely accepted that 'whoever carries it finds all that he requires'.¹⁰ Pero Pais, agreeing that salt was 'as useful as gold, nevertheless doubted whether it was true, as stated, that it was carried westwards as far as Monomotapa and Congo'.¹¹ The salt in question, Almeida explained, was not made from sea-water, for the 'author of nature' had provided 'perpetual and inexhaustible' supplies on the Dankali side of the borders of Tigre and Angot, where it was cut into blocks by axe. Alvares describes the pieces thus produced as a span and a half in length four fingers in width and three in thickness, whereas Almeida thought they were nearly a span long and almost three inches in the other two directions.¹²

5. Arab-Faqih, p. 353. *Vide* also Perruchon, *Règne de Lebna Dengel*, p. 285.

6. Alvarez, pp. 18-19.

7. Ludolphus, p. 205.

8. Poncet, p. 121.

9. A country to the west of Ethiopia which has not been identified.

10. Alvarez, p. 98. *Vide* Quiggin, pp. 52-3, for an examination of other areas of Africa where salt was used as a currency.

11. Beccari, Vol. II, pp. 233, 252.

12. Almeida, p. 44.



Salt bars used traditionally as currency.

From A. H. Quiggin, *A Survey of Primitive Money*.

The two authors agree, however, that though virtually identical in shape and size these bars of salt varied considerably in value from locality to locality in direct proportion to the distance from the mines. According to Alvares a *dram* of gold, that is to say the equivalent of a *pataca* or dollar, would buy 120 or 130 pieces where they were collected, 5 or 6 less at Corcoro market in Angot, and so on, ever less from market to market till, on reaching the Court on the borders of Shoa, a mere 6 or 7 pieces could be bought for a *dram* and only 5 in the rainy

season when it was difficult to preserve the salt from moisture. The salt was thus 'very cheap where it was obtained and very dear at Court', while in the far-off region of Damot¹³ it was said to be almost worth its weight in gold.¹⁴

Almeida, a century later corroborates this scale of exchange, stating that a *dram* was worth 80 to 100 pieces of salt at the markets nearest to the mines, 50 to 60 in Tigre, 25 to 30 in Dambea, still less in Gojam, and only 6 to 10 in Enarea when they were in good supply though often they did not reach that province at all.¹⁵

These variations were due to the fact that the salt had to be transported over long distances by donkey or mule on difficult mountain roads, often mere tracks, and across many rivers which during the rains were frequently impossible to ford. Furthermore, the loads were subjected to heavy taxation *en route*. The salt was stacked like faggots on to the beasts of burden. Alvares reports meeting on the road to the coast no fewer than 'three or four hundred animals in herds, laden with salt, and in the same way others going empty to fetch salt'. He added that these animals were said to belong to great lords, who sent them on this journey each year to procure the wherewithal to pay their expenses at court. 'One meets other files of twenty or thirty beasts (these are like those of muleteers); in other parts one meets men laden with salt, which they carry for themselves and others in order to make profit from fair to fair.'¹⁶ The salt caravans were in fact an almost permanent feature of the Ethiopian landscape. Thus a century later Father Lobo describes them in much the same manner, declaring that they could be seen making their way to the mines 'to carry salt into all Parts of the Empire which they set a great Value upon and which in their Country is of the same use as Money'.¹⁷

Many salt blocks, Almeida relates, were broken *en route* and thereby lost value. 'It is pitiful', he adds, 'to see the roads from Tigre to Dambea all constantly full of people in caravans of a thousand servers (as they call the men who carry it) and five

13. Damot, though today west of Gojam, is thought in the time of Alvares to have been the name designating a region west of Addis Ababa. *Vide Ethiopian Itineraries*, p. 78.

14. Alvarez, pp. 98-9.

15. Almeida, p. 44. *Vide* also Beccari, Vol. II, pp. 214-5, 252.

16. Alvarez, pp. 98-9.

17. Lobo, p. 28.

hundred donkeys loaded with these blocks so that they are crushed by their burdens, because they are usually far too great. What is worse is that nearly a third of the load is taken from them on the way at different customs posts by way of dues, and many leave it all at the precipices where they fall headlong because the mountains are so rugged and the path so narrow. The donkeys that die or are left exhausted in the desert for the wolves (hyenas?) are countless.¹⁸

Telles, whose account follows that of Almeida, adds that the salt was 'wonderful white, fine and hard' and that however much was extracted from the salt plain 'there was never any miss of it'. He relates that on one occasion his compatriots saw a salt caravan which they believed was composed of no less than six hundred beasts of burden, camels, mules and asses, of which the camels carried six hundred bars of salt and the asses one hundred and forty or one hundred and fifty; all these animals were 'continually going and coming'.¹⁹

Salt 'as white as snow and as hard as rock' was still used for 'small money' in Poncet's day as in those of Alvares and Almeida before him, serving 'both for money and domestic occasions'.

The Frenchman is the first foreign writer to call the salt bars by their modern Amharic name *amouli* or *amole*, a term which is also found at about this time in the chronicle of Iyasu I and may have been adopted in this period. According to Guidi it owed its origin to an Afar or Dankali tribe, called Amole, who introduced the salt into Ethiopia or assisted in its excavation or transportation.²⁰ Poncet's description of the *amole* as being a foot in length by three inches in breadth and thickness accords with the observations of the earlier writers; he differs from them however, in suggesting that the salt was first brought to the Emperor's magazines in large pieces and then cut into bars, called *amole*, or half bars called *courman*. Though he is here in error, the Amharic word *kurman* meaning a quarter not a half, even the incorrect use of the term, seems to add certitude to his suggestion that fractions of the *amole* were in use.²¹

The *amole* was still the main form of currency when Bruce visited the country at the end of the eighteenth century. He states

18. Almeida, pp. 44-5.

19. Tellez, p. 229. *Vide* also Beccari, Vol. I, p. 381.

20. Guidi, *Vocabulario*, col. 419.

21. Poncet, pp. 121-2.

that at Gondar seventy-two to seventy-six normally exchanged for an *oquea* of gold; in 1768, however, the exchange rate rose to eighty, and in 1771 it fell to thirty-four, though this was largely due to a 'great difference in the size of the bricks'.²² The production of this type of 'small money', he said, brought 'much benefit' to the Dankalis of the barren land whence it came.²³

Iron was also used as a type of currency in certain parts of the country.²⁴ Already mentioned, as we have seen, by the Arab writer Abu Salih (1170-1220),²⁵ it was described by Ibn Fadl Allah (*d.* 1349) as the normal medium of trade in the Muslim sultanates of Dawaro, Arababni(?), Sharkha and Hadya in which provinces pieces as long as a needle but three times as thick were called *hakuna*(?); they were apparently of little value for he says that a good cow in Dawaro cost as much as five thousand and a sheep three thousand *hakuna*.²⁶ Alvares states that in the province of Angot there were pieces of iron shaped like a shovel which were 'of no use for anything except for making something else'; each of these units was worth six or seven pieces of salt, while ten, eleven and sometimes twelve were worth a *dram* of gold or a Portuguese *cruzado*.²⁷ Almeida states that pieces of iron, which he describes as 'light and flat' and measuring two inches by three, circulated in Enarea, while Pais, who calls them thin bars about one inch by four, says they were known as *caera*.²⁸ The Portuguese writer, Diego do Couto, later reported that iron was used as a currency in the province of Voge and that it took the form of bars, seven of which were worth a Portuguese *pardão*.²⁹ They measured two-and-a-half fingers by a palm and a half; and had a small hole pierced in them by which they were hung round the head.³⁰

Various other commodities almost attained the importance of articles of exchange. The Ramusio text of Alvares states, for example, that pepper was often used in commercial transactions and that the Portuguese were told that it was 'the most highly

22. Bruce, 3rd ed., Vol. VII, p. 78.

23. *ibid.*, 1st ed., Vol. III, p. 250.

24. For a discussion of the iron currency of the Sudan, Congo and other parts of Africa, *vide* Quiggin, pp. 73-4; Einzig, pp. 120-3.

25. Evetts, p. 290.

26. Gaudefroy-Demombynes, pp. 14-15, 17, 26.

27. Alvarez, pp. 117, 133.

28. Almeida, p. 150; Beccari, Vol. III, p. 452.

29. A coin of Goa, equivalent to about 2s. 6d.

30. Couto, Vol. III, p. 165.

valued of all commodities' serving as 'the chief merchandise current in Ethiopia'.³¹

At the end of the eighteenth century Bruce noted the presence of a number of other forms of 'primitive money'. The most important in Tigre was coarse cotton pieces measuring about 16 peek by $1\frac{3}{4}$ (i.e. about $11\frac{1}{2}$ yards by $1\frac{1}{4}$), each of which was worth a *pataca*, or imperial dollar, that is to say a tenth of an *oquea* or ounce of gold.³² Various other goods were also accepted for purposes of exchange. At Kella, in Tigre, he discovered that the inhabitants 'would take no money for provisions, but only merchandise by way of barter'.³³ They preferred beads and *kohl*, but also accepted 'large needles, goat skins, coarse scissors, razors and steels for striking fire'.³⁴ *Kohl*, or antimony, was always in great demand as a cosmetic for the eye. At Shire, beads, needles, *kohl*, and sometimes incense, as well as cloth, were all 'considered as money'.³⁵ Beads, however, were 'a dangerous speculation. You lose sometimes everything or gain more than honestly you should do; for all depends upon fashion; and the fancies of a brown or black beauty there gives the *ton* as decisively as does the example of the fairest in England. To our great disappointment, the person employed to buy our beads at Jidda had not received the last list of fashions from this country; so he had bought us a quantity beautifully flowered with red and green, and as a large pea; also some large oval, green and yellow ones; however, the *ton* now among the beauties of Tigre were small sky-coloured blue beads about the size of small lead shot or seed pearls; blue bugles and common white bugles were then in demand and large yellow glass, flat in the sides like the amber beads formerly used by the better sort of the old women peasants in England. All our beads were then rejected by six or seven dozen of the shrillest tongues I ever heard'. As soon as the desired blue and white beads were displayed, 'a huge shout was set up by the women-purchasers and a violent scramble followed'.³⁶

Coins appear to have had a limited use, mainly in wholesale transactions. In the fourteenth century Ibn Fadl Allah noted that Egyptian *dinars* and *drams* had some currency in Ifat,³⁷ while a century later Brother Antonio of Lalibela told Zorzi that

31. See note 1 on p. 137.

32. Bruce, Vol. III, pp. 123, 133, 152.

33. *ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 107.

34. *ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 112.

35. *ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 153.

36. *ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 105, 107-8.

37. Gaudefroy-Demombynes, p. 14.

Hungarian and Venetian ducats and the 'silver coins of the Moors' were employed in purchasing consignments of imported goods at the major trading centre of Gendevclu or Gendebclu in the vicinity of the nineteenth-century market of Aliu Amba in Shoa.³⁸

Data are unfortunately insufficient to ascertain the exact position at Harar where trade was also highly developed and foreign coins were probably in use. Though a currency was struck in the city in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries it is uncertain whether it existed before then. What appear to be the three earliest coins of the city bear the dates 124, 125 and 615, but it is doubtful whether all these could be years of the Muslim calendar (i.e. A.D. 742-3, 743-4 and 1218-9), as it would seem unlikely that they should have been produced so many centuries earlier than the rest of the currency, the more so as there is a close similarity between the first two coins and the next earliest piece dated 1204 A.H. (A.D. 1790-1). Mr. A. J. Drewes of Leiden, a scholar of Harari culture, writes in a letter to the present author that though there is 'no doubt whatsoever' that the coins in question are in fact dated 124 and 125 they could not have been produced in the second century of the Islamic era, but were probably struck some eleven centuries later. As for the coin dated 615 he observes: 'The date seems to be rather early but the reading may be correct.' It would therefore appear that the dates 124 and 125 are reckoned, not from the beginning of the Muslim era, but from some considerably later event, such as, for example, A.D. 1647 the year when the city of Harar became independent of the Imamate of Aussa under Ali bin Daud. If the above arguments are correct it may be concluded that one type of coin was struck in the thirteenth century, though the remainder are more recent. Two other issues occurred during our period; they are dated 1203 and 1204 A.H. respectively, i.e. 1789-90 and 1790-1 of the European calendar.³⁹

Trading conditions at Massawa also necessitated a more developed system of currency than existed inland. The same coins were used at the port as on the opposite coast of Arabia because of the commercial intercourse across the Red Sea. 'Everything',

38. *Ethiopian Itineraries*, p. 173.

39. A more extensive discussion of the Harari currency will be found in Volume II of the present work.

Bruce says, 'was therefore valued in Venetian sequins, though glass beads, called *Contaria*, of all kinds and colours, perfect and broken, passed as small money and were locally referred to as *Borjooke* (*Birchiqo*).⁴⁰

Table of the Relative Value of Massawa Money

1 Venetian Sequin	2 $\frac{1}{4}$ Pataca
1 Pataca or Imperial Dollar	28 Harf
1 Harf	4 Diwani
1 Diwani, or para	10 Kibeer
1 Kibeer	3 Borjooke, or grains

The *Harf* was also called *Dahab*, a word which Bruce calls 'very equivocal', as in Arabic it meant gold, but was also frequently used for a sequin. The *zermabub*, or sequin of Constantinople, was not current at Massawa; they could only be disposed of to the women, who 'hung them about their temples, to their necklaces and round the necks of the children'.⁴¹

Bruce, it should be noted, visited Ethiopia between 1768 and 1773, that is to say immediately before the introduction of the Maria Theresa thaler which spread throughout the Middle East in the next few decades; in Ethiopia it was subsequently used for roughly a century and a half.

Further to the south in Mogadishu a locally made currency appears to have been minted from c. 1300 to c. 1700. Numismatic research by Sir G. S. P. Freeman-Grenville indicates that Chinese, Ceylonese and Annamese coins were also widely used in the Mogadishu-Brava area. The majority of the coins thus far found in this region are Chinese of the Sung dynasty (960-1279), though the Ming (1368-1644) and Ching (1644-1911) dynasties are also well represented.⁴² (See Appendix D.)

40. Amharic and Tigrinya, glass.

41. Bruce, Vol. III, pp. 53-4; 3rd ed., Vol. III, p. 78.

42. *Vide Journal of African History*, Vol. I, No. I.

Chapter 22

Nile Waters

THOUGH IT seems certain that the Emperors of Ethiopia were unable in this period to change the course of the Nile to the detriment of Egypt, the belief that they could do so persisted for centuries. As early as the middle of the eleventh century the Arab writer Ibn Al Amid stated that his contemporary, Sultan Mustansir, had sent the Coptic Patriarch to remonstrate with the Ethiopians whom he believed responsible for an apparent drying up of the river. Ethiopian tradition holds that a century or so later Lalibela (*c.* 1200?), the Emperor responsible for the building of some of the famous rock churches in Lasta, actually set about deflecting the course of several tributaries of the Blue Nile in a southerly direction. It was believed that he only abandoned the project on being told by the monks that this would increase the Muslim population of Adal. Bruce relates that in his day it was said that the site of Lalibela's earthworks could still be seen.¹ Later again, in 1325, emissaries are said to have arrived in Cairo from Ethiopia bringing a letter from their sovereign threatening to curtail the flow of water unless the Egyptians stopped their persecution of the Copts and rebuilt the churches which they had destroyed. Such threats were taken at their face value. In 1335 Giovannino of Verona observed that Prester John could prevent the Nile from reaching Egypt. An Ethiopian legend of this time held that the Egyptians had paid tribute to Ethiopia until the reign of the Emperor Dawit I (1382-1411). At that time they refused to do so, whereupon Dawit set about turning the course of the river; the Egyptians therefore considered it wiser to recommence their gifts which included four pieces of the True Cross.² A little later, in 1450, we find King Affonso of Aragon urging

1. Bruce, Vol I, pp. 529-31. For a discussion on Lalibela's supposed interest in dam-building, *vide* Bidder, pp. 16-17, 113-17.
2. It is generally believed in Ethiopia that a piece of wood from the True Cross was brought to Ethiopia from Jerusalem during this reign. *Vide* Budge, Vol. I, p. 300. Ethiopian embassies arrived in Egypt in the years 1274, 1290, 1312, 1325, between 1332 and 1338, 1381, 1386, 1437, 1443, 1453 and 1481. Wiet, p. 134.

the Emperor Zara Yaqob (1434-1468) to cut the flow of the Nile, while ten years later Fra Mauro included in his map of Ethiopia a drawing of the imaginary gates in the north of the empire which he thought the Prester would use to close the river's normal bed, thereby diverting the waters into the deserts of the Sudan.³ The German pilgrim Arnold von Harff, who left Cologne in 1496 on a visit to the East and returned at the end of the century, fully accepted the view that the Emperor of Ethiopia whom he calls Theodard – presumably Tewodros, or Theodore I (1411-1414) – 'could stop the flow of the Nile, so that it would run down to the left and not through Egypt, beside Cairo. In order that this should not happen', he adds, 'the Sultan has to pay . . . a great yearly tribute. Further, when these Christian Abyssinians, or Jacobites, as they are called, come from this province to Jerusalem, or to the Sultan's country, they pay no tribute and go with banners unfurled to Jerusalem into the Temple of Christ, without paying tribute, and no injury must be done them lest the River Nile be stopped'.⁴ About a decade later the same legend is heard from Brother Raphael, who told Zorzi of his sovereign's supposed power over the river, declaring that he only refrained from turning it away from Cairo because of the fear that the Moors would ruin the churches of Egypt and expel the monks in Jerusalem and Cairo.⁵

Affonso d'Albuquerque, the Portuguese governor of India, was no less convinced. According to his son his principal ambition round 1513 was to pierce through 'a very small range' of Ethiopian hills so as to divert the Nile 'into another bed' and 'destroy the irrigation of the lands of Cairo'. Accordingly he many times requested King Manoel of Portugal to send him workmen from Madeira Island who were accustomed to cutting rocks and digging irrigation trenches. Albuquerque, however, was soon afterwards recalled with the result that the plan was abandoned at least as far as the Portuguese were concerned.⁶

The learned Ludolphus appears to have been the first foreign writer on Ethiopia to express scepticism on this score. While admitting that the question had 'much perplex'd' him he argued that 'to raise a Mole or Dam of Stones', and then remove it were

3. Wiet, pp. 123, 132-3.

4. Von Harff, p. 178.

5. *Ethiopian Itineraries*, p. 145.

6. Dalbuquerque, Vol. IV, p. 36. *Vide also* Vol. IV, p. 207.

'things requiring so much toyl and labour' as to be totally impracticable for the Ethiopians; it therefore seemed to him 'unlikely that so vast a River, so long accustom'd to a declining and headlong Course' could be 'diverted and compell'd to change its channel'. Had the enterprise been within the bounds of possibility he wondered why the Emperor allowed the Egyptian Christians, who were of his own religion, and the Patriarch, who was the head of his church, 'to groan under such a miserable Bondage', and why the Jesuits had not attempted to 'insinuate into the heads of the Abbessines to make use of that Power which Nature had placed into their hands'.⁷

Over a century later, however, we find the Emperor Takla Haymanot I (1706-1708) writing a strong letter of protest to the Pasha of Cairo complaining that the French ambassador, M. Lenoir du Roule and a young Armenian trader, Murad, were detained in Sennar. Asserting that this was a violation of 'the law of nations' the Emperor declared: 'We could very soon repay you in kind if we were inclined to revenge the insult you have offered to the man Murad on our part; the Nile would be sufficient to punish you, since God hath put in our power his foundation, his outlet, and his increase, and that we can dispose of the same to do you harm.'⁸

Belief in this threat was nevertheless on the wane. Thus Bruce writing of the seventeen-seventies states that no sensible person in Ethiopia believed it was possible.⁹

7. Ludolphus, pp. 10-19.

8. Bruce, Vol. II, pp. 526-7.

9. *ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 715.

Chapter 23

Problems of Communication

ALL THE foreign observers of this time were impressed by the immense difficulty of communications in Ethiopia. Alvares, who observed that throughout the country there were no bridges of either stone or wood, states that it was almost always necessary for merchants to travel in caravan because of Arab raiders, bandits and wild beasts.¹

During the subsequent war with Grañ the Portuguese army of intervention introduced a number of cannon with wheels and made 24 sledges shod with iron. Castanhoso states that the construction work and the training of the animals cost 'great labour', and that 'much trouble' was experienced on rough land where these vehicles had frequently to be taken to pieces and carried by hand.

Almeida later described in some detail the problems which confronted the Jesuits. Describing the much frequented trade route which crossed the mountain which he calls Dagusa at the base of Lamalmon, he observes: 'This is climbed in half a day, going around it all the time like a spiral, along a path often so narrow that it is very frightening. As one goes up the mountain slope a large part of it is over one's head and below are such precipices that if you once stumbled and fell over that side there would be nowhere you could stop. There are many travellers, for the journey is usually made in caravans of many people, because of the robbers that abound, so that a caravan going one way often meets an oncoming one. There are innumerable donkeys and it is common for many of them to be dashed to pieces over the precipices and their loads lost.'²

No creature, the thoughtful Ludolphus later declared, could perform the same kindness to Ethiopia as 'the mule that travelled over so many Craggie Rocks and Mountains where it is impossible for Waggon, Carts or Coaches to pass'.³ Wheeled traffic,

1. Alvarez, p. 361.

3. Ludolphus, p. 217.

2. Whiteway, pp. 23-6, 45; Almeida, p. 40.

he elsewhere noted, was totally unknown in Ethiopia, its use being in fact precluded by the absence of suitable roads. His friend Gregory had informed him that the Ethiopians were accustomed to ride horses and mules from childhood,⁴ but that he had 'wondered when he saw our covered Wains' (wagons) and 'called that wherein he and I travelled together, *Bet*, a House, and wished he had such a one to carry him into Ethiopia'.⁵

The problem of communications in this mountainous country, particularly in the rainy season, was fully appreciated by Ludolphus. Gregory wrote to him, saying, 'There is no making War in Ethiopia in Winter time [i.e. in the rainy season]; neither does the Enemy attack us, nor we them; by reason of the great falls of Rain and the Inundations of the Rivers.'⁶ This statement is fully confirmed by Bruce. 'The rainy season,' he says, 'generally puts an end to the active part of war, as everyone retires then to towns and villages to screen themselves from the inclemency of the climate, deluged now with daily rain. . . . The valleys are soon divided by large and rapid torrents. Every hollow footpath becomes a stream, and the valleys between the hills become so miry as not to bear horse; and the waters, both deep and violent, are too apt to shift their direction to suffer anyone on foot to pass safely. All this season, and this alone, people sleep in their houses in safety; their lances and shields are hung up on the sides of their hall, and their saddles and bridles taken off their horses. . . . The court, and the principal officers of the government, retire to the capital, and there administer justice, make alliances, and prepare the necessary funds and armaments, which the present exigencies of the state require on the return of fair weather.'⁷

The inconvenience and hazards of mountain climbs can in fact only be compared with those involved in crossing the country's innumerable rivers and torrents, some of which were infested with crocodiles. Father Lobo tells that on one occasion he was able to cross the Blue Nile in the dry season by leaping 'from one rock to another', reaching the opposite bank to the amazement of all.⁸ Almeida, on the other hand, relates that when the Blue Nile ford at Mine was impassable travellers were obliged to con-

4. Flemming, p. 97.

5. Ludolphus, pp. 393-4.

6. *ibid.*, p. 217.

7. Bruce, Vol. II, pp. 17-18.

8. Lobo, pp. 119-20.

struct a raft made of poles roughly fastened together and interspersed with gourds which helped them to float. 'Young men', he says, 'swam in front and guided the raft, and others pushed behind. As this was a slow proceeding and the raft could not hold much baggage or many people they spent a whole day going to and fro across the river.'⁹ Telles reports that on another occasion a party of travellers 'kill'd a Cow and of the Hide they made a great Sack, into which they put the Bagage and blowing strongly fill'd it full of Wind like a Bladder; and this was to carry the luggage and serve for a Boat. Then they took two Poles, like those our Chairs are carried on, and ty'd them very fast to the blown Hide, and to those Poles two Men hung on the one side and two on the other, who were to hold very steady, and be equal weight to Ballance, for the Thing was like a Scale, and therefore if the weight was not alike, or any one happen'd to move all must plunge, and the stream being very rapid, they were in imminent Danger of their Lives. This new Machine was guided before by a good Swimmer, pulling a Rope made fast to the Hide, or the ends of the Poles. Two others swam behind, thrusting the Invention forward. Thus they cross'd the River'.¹⁰ The dangers of this mode of crossing are emphasized by the ever-frightened Lobo who says that crocodiles could easily overturn such rafts and tear their passengers to pieces.¹¹ Bruce, describing a similar state of affairs towards the end of the eighteenth century, states that in times of war the Gallas crossed the Blue Nile in various ways. Some swam, others assisted themselves in their passage by inflating goat skins as bladders; some constructed small rafts each attached to two skins filled with air, while others held tight to their horses' tails and were drawn across by them. This last method was apparently often used by the womenfolk when they followed the army across unfordable rivers.¹²

Almeida also mentions two crude bridges constructed without mortar, the absence of which remained for centuries an obstacle to good building. At Alata, about a mile below the Blue Nile falls, the river was so 'constricted and narrow' that it was possible to cross on 'thick poles placed on both banks of the river'. On one occasion the Emperor's entire army had crossed over this

9. Almeida, pp 145-6.

10. Tellez, p. 196.

11. Lobo, p. 109.

12. Bruce, Vol. III, pp. 646-7; *vide* also Vol. II, pp. 311, 445.

make-shift bridge.¹³ Almeida elsewhere describes an even more primitive bridge over the Gibe river which, he said, carried 'a greater volume of water than the Nile'. In one place this river ran in a gorge between cliffs, rushing over boulders and rocks on which the torrent broke with a frightening roar. But what frightened his compatriots more was 'the bridge by which they had to cross, which was merely a log long enough to reach from rock to rock across the width of the river, which was no little distance. To look down was to look at hell; when anyone set foot on the log it shook like a green twig. None the less they all crossed over, vying with one another to be first, for the country on one bank belonged to the Gallas, on the other side to the Kingdom of Gingero where they thought themselves safe'.¹⁴

The first stone bridge was built, according to Almeida, by order of the Emperor Susneyos in 1626 soon after the stone for making lime had been discovered in the country. It was erected near the old bridge of poles at Alata on the Blue Nile, and consisted of a single arch, the work of craftsmen brought by the Portuguese from India, the chief of whom according to the chronicle of this reign was called Abd el Kerim.¹⁵ This bridge, Lobo significantly remarks, 'very much facilitates a Communication between the Provinces, and encourages Commerce among the Inhabitants of the Empire'.¹⁶ During the subsequent reign of Fasiladas (1632-1667) several more bridges were built in the Gondar-Lake Tana area. By the last quarter of the seventeenth century communications had thus been considerably improved, the most important bridges being two over the Blue Nile, one at Alata and one at Silé, one at the junction of the Angareb and the Kaha, and one each over the rivers Angareb, Magech, Magelb and Reb. The existence of a political obstacle to bridge building can, however, be seen in the more troubled days of the eighteenth century when the people of Gojam jealous of their isolation deliberately tore a four-metre gap in the bridge at Silé to prevent threatened invasion.¹⁷

13. Almeida, p. 26.

14. *ibid.*, p. 155.

15. *ibid.*, pp. 26-7. *Vide also Guida dell' Africa Orientale*, p. 392; Pereira, *Chronica de Susneyos*, pp. 225, 567.

16. Lobo, p. 114. *Vide also* Pereira, pp. 203, 225; Beccari, Vol. VIII, p. 32.

17. Monti della Corte, *I Castelli di Gondar*, pp. 57-9; Ruppell, Vol. II, pp. 77, 196-7, 199, 209, 212-3; Combes and Tamisier, Vol. III, p. 289; Gabre Sellassie, Vol. II, pp. 561-2.



Seventeenth-century stone bridge over the Kaha River.

From T. Waldmeier, *Autobiography*.

Because of the swiftness of the rivers of Northern Ethiopia boats were virtually restricted to certain lakes, such as Tana and Haiq, though, as we shall see, they were used on at least one occasion to convey the Emperor's army across the Hawash during the war against Grañ. Arab-Faqih and Almeida both saw *tankwas* on Lake Tana; these small canoes were made of the reeds which grew in the marshes beside the lake; Poncet noted with interest that such craft 'held not above six persons' and were 'compos'd of mats of rush join'd very neatly, and without being

tarr'd or pitched'.¹⁸ The boats on Lake Haiq appear to have been inferior to those on Lake Tana,¹⁹ and were constructed, Alvares says, of bundles of rushes with some eight planks of wood.²⁰

A number of attempts were made to introduce other types of vessels. Arab-Faqih relates that, during his occupation of Dambea, Ahmad Grañ decided to occupy the islands on Lake Tana and that an Arab in his army, Ahmed bin Soliman el-Mahri, cut down eight big trees which were hollowed into large canoes each of which could hold thirty men. However only three of these boats appear to have been used: Grañ embarked in one and his Arab supporters in the other two, and together they made for the island of Galila where they overcame the Christian monks who were established there.²¹ Several generations later Almeida reported that during the period of the Portuguese missions, an Ethiopian ecclesiastic was said to have built a big boat, but that it had gone to the bottom on its first voyage because it had been caulked with resin instead of pitch which was not available in the country. One of the Portuguese, he added, had also attempted to make a boat and had caulked it with incense; 'everybody' had 'come to see the novelty', but though it had 'made several voyages', it was not much used 'because there were no oarsmen'.²²

About a century later the chronicle of the Emperor Bakaffa (1721-1730) records that this sovereign went to the island of Bergida on Lake Tana in 1726 with all his nobles to inspect a vessel which had been constructed by two artisans from Egypt, Demetros and Giyorgis, who, to judge from their names, were most probably Greeks. They had worked with the manual assistance of two Ethiopians, Esat Wellag and Ansach Mammo, and had received advice from a third, Eraqlis, chief of the *taj* makers. The boat, the chronicler quaintly observes, was built round a central axle covered with planks of thick wood. It measured twenty cubits long and was three cubits wide at the centre tapering towards the ends. The prow was like the neck of a camel and the poop ended in a kind of throne. On every side there was a parapet fitted with door-like panels. Though there were many of these they seemed to be made of one piece

18. Arab Faqih, pp. 464-6; Almeida, p. 36; Poncet, p. 135.

19. Both types of boat still exist. *Vide* Buxton, *Travels in Ethiopia*, pp. 126-7, 116.

21. Arab-Faqih, pp. 464-6.

20. Alvarez, p. 150.

22. Almeida, p. 36.

because they had been manufactured by skilful workmen who knew how to join wood so that not even a single drop of water could penetrate. On to the axle were fitted two columns (masts). The one on the side of the prow was short, but the other, which was in the centre, was very high. In a hole near the top of this column a plank was placed transversely and to it a sail was attached. It had six wheels (rings) of bronze attached to six solidly woven ropes which held together all the wood of the ship. On the top of the column was the flag (sail) which took the wind and led the ship to port when required. When not required for sailing it was taken down and rolled up but at other times it was run up and unfurled. For caulking the craftsmen had used incense and earth, *nug* oil and water, cotton and *tēf* straw. The main body of the boat was held together by bronze 'equal to two hundred plough shares'. The vessel was called *tabot*²³ because it was a dwelling, *hamar* because it was spacious, *jalba* because it was light, and *markab* because it was high. It was made of *wanza*,²⁴ a wood which was not attacked by worms.²⁵

Though the difficulties of communication were intensified by the absence of inns and eating houses, the state insisted that the traveller should receive hospitality on the way. 'The Great Men and the richer sort,' Ludolphus relates, 'carry all their Domestic Household stuff along with them upon their Mules; and where Night overtakes them they pitch their Tents and kindle Fires about them to scare the Wild Beasts. The poorer sort when they have occasion to Travel beg upon the Road, for there is not an Inn to be seen among them, and for Cooks' Shops and Ordinaries they know as little what belongs to them. Upon which happened a pleasant accident at Rome where the simple Habesines newly arrived out of the East being walking in the Suburbs, were invited by a Cook into his Shop. They believing all Invitations to be made gratis, at first admired the Hospitality of the Man, but then considering that it might be done out of Curiosity to see and discourse with strangers, went into the Shop; and very cheerfully accepted of what was set before them: but at length when they were going away they consulted together for Phrase and Language to return their thanks to so kind an Host for his

23. *Tabot*, the ark of the covenant found in all Ethiopian churches; *hamar*, *jalba* and *markab* are different names for various types of boat.

24. *Cordia abyssinica*.

25. Guidi, *Annales Iohannis I, Iyasu I et Bakaffa*, pp. 337-9.

liberal Entertainment, which one among the rest, who best understood the Language was to deliver to the cook in the behalf of his Companions. The Cook having listen'd a while to their Learned Speech, and not hearing a word of any Money, without any respect to the smoothness of their Language, Gentlemen, said he, who pays? The Habessines like Men Astonished made answer, that they came not into his Shop of their own accord, but by his Invitation, without any mention made of Expectancy of Payment; and that he, when he set his Wine and his Meat before them, never bargained for any Money for that was the very thing they wanted. But all this would not satisfie the Cook, who forc'd them to leave their Cloaks in Pawn which were afterwards redeem'd at the Pope's Charity which made the Courtiers not a little Merry.'

At pains to show that the Ethiopians were a hospitable people, Ludolphus adds: 'the Habessines are not ignorant of Hospitality for that in their Villages they appoint the Chiefest of the Inhabitants for the Relief of the Poor: and indeed the Exercise of Hospitality is highly recommended by the Apostolical Doctrine for the Relief of poor People driven from their abode by the misfortunes of War or other Calamities.'²⁶

Barradas, who treats of this custom in some detail, shows that the obligation to give hospitality varied with circumstances. When a governor was passing through his domains for the first time the villagers were expected to feed him and his companions for three days, but on subsequent occasions only for a single day. Refreshment offered had to include meat, bread, honey, wine and beer in the proportion of ten *caloes* of beer and five of wine for every one hundred *injeras*. Failure to observe these duties was severely punished. Hospitality to travellers other than the governor had also to be given, but merely for one night. The expected meal varied with the standing of the guest who according to his degree might be given a lamb or goat or a fowl besides bread, beer and wine. Should any guest go to sleep without supper, either because it was not forthcoming or because it was rejected as unsatisfactory, he was entitled to complain to the governor in which case the illiberal host would be obliged to forfeit twice as much as he was supposed to have given.²⁷

26. Ludolphus, pp. 393-4.

27. Beccari, Vol. IV, pp. 186-7.

This institution is also described by a number of other contemporary observers, among them Father Jerome Lobo, the Yamani ambassador Hasan bin Ahmad, and Charles Poncet. Lobo, writing of the 1620's, notes: 'One custom of this country deserves to be remarked: When a stranger comes to a village, or to the camp, the people are obliged to entertain him and his company according to his rank. As soon as he enters an house (for they have no inns in this nation), the master informs his neighbours that he hath a guest; immediately they bring in bread, and all kinds of provisions; and there is great care taken to provide enough; because, if the guest complains, the town is obliged to pay double the value of what they ought to have furnished. This practice is so well established, that a stranger goes into a house of one he never saw with the same familiarity and assurance of welcome, as into that of an intimate friend, or near relation; a custom very convenient, but which gives encouragement to great numbers of vagabonds through the Kingdom.'²⁸

Hasan bin Ahmad, who landed at the Red Sea port of Beilul in 1648, states that the ruler of Sahart ordered the people of that province to carry the visitor's baggage and that they were accompanied by a 'mighty troop' of perhaps two thousand men with lances and horses.²⁹ Poncet, who entered Ethiopia in 1699 from the Sudan, relates that on reaching Girana his bags were taken care of by the lord of the village who put them in the hands of his vassals. The latter were obliged to carry them to the next village and so on till they reached Gondar. 'All this', the Frenchman records, 'was performed with a wonderful exactness and fidelity'.³⁰

28. Lobo, p. 73.

29. Peiser, p. 32.

30. Poncet, p. 113.

Chapter 24

The Division of Labour

SINCE, AS Adam Smith declared in his *Wealth of Nations*, the division of labour depends primarily on the extent of the market, it is not surprising that there was little specialization in Ethiopia at this time. The inconvenience of communications, the unsettling effects of generations of conflict, the absence of a fixed capital, the loss of the ports and the consequent difficulties of overseas trade all combined to restrict the market and hence to reduce the division of labour to a minimum.

The Ethiopian population was in great measure self-sufficient. Ludolphus exaggerated little when he observed: 'everyone undertakes to supply his own wants either by his own or the pains of his servants.' There were therefore, he added, 'no Guilds, or Fraternities of Tradesmen'; instead 'whatever Art anyone Professes that he teaches His children. The Trumpeteers and Hornwinders are all of the same Families and have their particular Country and Mansions by themselves'.¹

Some division of labour was of course inevitable. Climatic differences between one part of the country and another resulted in the development of farming in the highlands and nomadic pasturage in the lowlands. Although the two areas were basically self-sufficient, in some places a certain amount of exchange took place between them. Differences in altitude also led to some specialization in agriculture, and, consequently, to an exchange of products. The natural differentiation of function within the family was also accompanied by specialization of work: the women tended to stay at home, grinding corn, cooking and spinning, while the men worked in the fields, did the weaving, washed the thicker type of clothing in neighbouring rivers, and, when occasion arose, went to war.²

Adherence to traditional methods meant that much time was spent in the preparation of food and clothing. The grinding of

1. Ludolphus, p. 391.

2. *Ethiopian Itineraries*, p. 171; Ludolphus, p. 387; Bruce, Vol. II, p. 605.

corn was particularly laborious. The grain was put into a dish and then rubbed round with a wooden pestle till it was 'all bruised', when it was sifted and made into bread.³ Ethiopian handicrafts, though less elaborate and perfected than those of India or China, were nonetheless well developed; the Portuguese, as we have seen, mention the manufacture of hornware, pottery, leatherware and basketry, while Zorzi's informants state that reeds were used to make articles for the household such as baskets, as well as boats for Lake Tana.⁴

The political, social and religious structure of the country necessitated a further division of function on the part of chiefs, priests, judges, farmers and soldiers. These and other groups are referred to in Bahrey's *History of the Gallas*, probably the only contemporary Ethiopian work to refer to the country's occupational pattern. Writing in 1592 or 1593 its author, who was himself a monk, gives the following information in an interesting passage in which he attempts to explain the victories of the Gallas as follows: 'The wise men often discuss these matters, and say, "How is it that the Galla defeat us, though we are numerous and well supplied with arms?"' Some have said that God has allowed it because of our sins; others, that it is because our nation is divided into ten classes, nine of which take no part whatever in war, and make no shame of displaying their fear; only the tenth makes war and fights to the best of its ability. Now, although we are numerous, those who can fight in war are few in number, and there are many who go not to war. Of these classes, the first is that of the monks, of whom there are vast numbers. Among them are those who become monks while they are studying, as indeed was the case with him who has written this history, and others like him. There are also others who become monks because they fear war. A second group is composed of those who are called *dabtara*, or clerks; they study the holy books and all works relating to the occupations of the clergy; they clap their hands and stamp their feet during divine service, and have no shame for their fear of going to the wars. These people take as their models the levites and priests, namely, the sons of Aaron. The third group is that of the people called *Jan Hatsana* and *Jan Maasare*,⁵ who look after the administration of

3. Ludolphus, p. 387.

4. *Ethiopian Itineraries*, p. 169.

5. Lay officials of the royal household.

justice, and keep themselves from war. The fourth group is formed by those who escort the wives of dignitaries and the princesses; they are vigorous, brave and strong men who nevertheless do not go to war, for they say, "We are the protectors of women." The fifth group calls itself *Semagelle* (*Shimagile*), "elders"; they are the lords and hereditary landowners; they share their land with their labourers, and are not ashamed of their fear. The sixth group is that of the *gabarawi*, labourers in agriculture, who live in the fields and have no thought of taking part in war. The seventh group is composed of those who engage in trade and gain profit thereby. The eighth group is that of artisans, such as the smiths, scribes, carpenters, and such-like, who know not the art of war. The ninth group is that of the wandering singers, those who play the *qanda kabaro*⁶ and the *bagana*,⁷ whose profession is to beg, to collect money. They invoke blessings on those who reward them, flattering them with vain praises and idle panegyrics; while those who refuse to give them presents they curse, though they are not held blameworthy for this, for, as they say, "This is our custom." Such people keep themselves as far as possible from war. The tenth group, finally, is composed of those who carry the shield and spear, who can fight, and who follow the steps of their King to war. It is because these are so few in number that our country is ruined.' Among the Gallas, he concluded, nine out of these ten classes did not exist: 'all men, from small to great, are instructed in warfare, and for this reason they ruin and kill us.'⁸

Though Bahrey expressly mentions traders and artisans, without however specifying their religion, most foreign observers suggest that these were few in number and mainly members of minority groups: Arabs, and, by extension, Muslims in general, Syrians and Egyptian Copts, Falashas (Jews), Greeks, Armenians and other Europeans or 'Franks' as they were called – all of whom tended to enjoy a monopolistic position and therefore to perpetuate this religious, cultural or racial element in the division of labour. Castanhoso, for example, writing at the time of Grañ's conquest, noted with surprise that throughout the empire he had seen no Ethiopian craftsmen gaining their living as in

6. A small drum.

7. A ten-stringed lyre.

8. *Some Records of Ethiopia*, pp. 125–6.

other parts of the world,⁹ while a century later Ludolphus declared that 'nothing' was more needed than for the Ethiopian Christians to engage in 'Handicraft Trades'.¹⁰

Their failure to do so, originally caused perhaps by the country's economic backwardness, was intensified by other factors. The Christians of the plateau, who constituted the core of the empire's population, seemed reluctant to take up manual occupations other than farming, and were generally prevented from engaging in trade by the Arabs on the coast who exerted considerable influence also on the commerce of the interior. This led to a curious division of labour in which the Christians were the principal farmers, soldiers and administrators, while the Muslims, who would have found it difficult to become big land-owners as ownership of land was largely connected with military service, were often traders or weavers, while the Falashas achieved notoriety by working in certain handicrafts generally held in low repute.

Alvares, touching on this religious division of labour in the sixteenth century, shows that in respect of trade it was further complicated by the traditional dietary rules preventing adherents of one faith from eating meat killed by those of another. The Emperor's camp, he explained, was always the site of a large market which catered for the requirements of the nobility and army. The 'greater part of the sellers' and 'the principal merchants of stuffs and large goods' were invariably 'Moors' (Muslims). They sold 'nothing to eat', however, because the Christians (who constituted the great bulk of the court and army) could not 'eat anything which the Moors make, nor meat which they kill'. Christians (many of whom were farmers) were therefore the sole traders in foodstuffs, dealing in 'low priced goods, such a bread, wine, flour and meat'.¹¹

Christians and Muslims, as we have seen, practised segregation in some areas, especially in parts of Tigre. Alvares says that in that province 'the villages of the Moors' (who were mainly engaged in trade), were separated from those of the Christians and were said to pay 'much tribute to the lords of the country in gold and silk stuffs'.¹² At Manadeley, for example, there were

9. Whiteway, p. 94.

10. Ludolphus, p. 391.

11. Alvarez, p. 336.

12. *ibid.*, p. 95.

about one thousand 'Moors' all tributary to Prester John, and at one end of the town, 'as if apart', twenty or thirty Christian families, some of whom were responsible for the collection of customs dues.¹³ There was, however, 'great intercourse' between the two communities, and some of the Christians and Christian women carried water to the 'Moors' and washed their clothes.¹⁴ As will be seen in later centuries such segregation was probably not typical of the empire as a whole.

Almeida makes the following observations about the Muslim population in the succeeding century: 'The Moors live mixed up with the Christians throughout the whole empire. They make up nearly a third of the population of Ethiopia, for there is no Kingdom in which there are not some, and certain provinces are wholly populated with them. They live by cultivating the land and by trade. They do not allow Christians to come to the sea ports, especially those of Arabia, Moqha (Mocha), Iuda (Jeddah), Odida (Hodeida), and the rest, and though the former do come to Maçua (Massawa), the Moors are better received and more welcome there, so that they are left in control of all the important trade of Ethiopia. The great and rich men of this empire all have many of these Moors as their agents, and they carry gold to the sea for them and bring them silks and clothing. As they are not very scrupulous they usually profit by their management of other people's business, so that they get fat and rich on the pickings.'¹⁵

Ludolphus took a similar view. 'The Muslims', Gregory had told him, 'live in our country in small numbers; they have no mosque for they are our servants for trade; also they are the weavers of our cloth.'¹⁶ 'The Habessines', Ludolphus himself remarked, 'are in no way addicted or expert in the Art and Intreagues of Merchandising, for they that will not travel into Foreign Parts must yield their gains to others. . . . Therefore, the Arabians who inhabit the Ports of the Red Sea, especially the Mahometans scattered over the Kingdom are the Chief Merchants in Habessinia, for being of the same Religion they have the free liberty of all the Ports of the Red Sea'.¹⁷

13. *ibid.*, p. 103.

14. *ibid.*, p. 152.

15. Almeida, p. 55. *Vide* also Ludolphus, pp. 73-4.

16. Flemming, p. 99.

17. Ludolphus, pp. 390-1.

Bruce draws a similar picture of the late eighteenth century. The followers of Islam, he informs us, were pre-eminent as traders not only in the region of Massawa and the coast but far into the interior. Thus describing the 'considerable village' of Tangouri outside Gondar he remarks that it was 'inhabited by Mahometans, whose occupation was to go in caravans far to the south, on the other side of the (Blue) Nile, through several districts of Galla'.¹⁸ 'Every great man in Abyssinia,' he elsewhere states, 'had a Muslim factor' or *jabarti* while the Emperor himself had 'many', among them 'the shrewdest and most intelligent of their profession'.¹⁹

The position of the Falashas was complicated by their willingness to become goldsmiths and blacksmiths and thus to enter trades which popular superstition associated with magic and witchcraft. Almeida relates that in his day there were 'many' Falashas in Dambea and other regions and that they were 'great smiths'. They lived by weaving cloth and by making *zargunchos* (lances), ploughs and other iron articles. On one occasion the Emperor Zara Yaqob (1434-1468) was reported to have killed all the goldsmiths and blacksmiths - irrespective of their religion - believing them to be sorcerers.

Belief in such supernatural powers was so common in Ethiopia, Almeida declares, that it was 'quite usual to suspect nearly all illnesses of coming from sorcerers and to attribute them to the blacksmiths'. 'Many of them', he added, 'pay for it, as the relatives of those who die kill them, on the suspicion of having caused the deaths by those devilish acts'.²⁰ Many Ethiopians, Barradas agrees, had no belief in the existence of natural diseases, considering them the work of blacksmiths or possibly goldsmiths. It was sufficient to think that a particular blacksmith was responsible for a person's illness; no proof was required; relatives and members of the public would at once threaten the unfortunate craftsman with death if the patient failed to recover.²¹ Ludolphus corroborates this picture. 'So far', he wrote, 'the Jews were almost the only persons that employed themselves in weaving cotton: they also made the Heads of the Spears and several other pieces of Workmanship in Iron for they are excellent Smiths, a sort of Trade otherwise abhorred by the Habessines which Gregory

18. Bruce, Vol. III, p. 385.

19. *ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 9.

20. Almeida, pp. 54-5.

21. Beccari, Vol. IV, p. 61.

confirmed with a smile, saying that the silly vulgar people could not endure Smiths *as being the sort of Mortals that spit fire and were bred up in Hell.*²²

The Falashas appear to have declined considerably in numbers²³ for Bermudes had earlier said that on one hill, four leagues wide, he had seen no fewer than ten or twelve thousand of them living 'in such luxury' that they might 'boast that they still enjoyed manna'.²⁴

Towards the end of the eighteenth century Bruce reported that the Falashas still played their traditional role particularly in the Gondar area though many had elsewhere voluntarily embraced Christianity.²⁵ As in the days of Almeida and Ludolphus they practised handicraft trades held in disrepute by other Ethiopians. He adds that they lived apart in their own settlements which were 'generally strongly situated out of the reach of marching armies', arguing that otherwise in those unsettled times they would have been 'constantly rifled, partly from hatred and partly from hopes of finding money'.²⁶ They had, however, a number of villages in close proximity to Gondar.²⁷ The Falasha population, he believed, had 'considerably diminished' from former times, a fact which had 'proportionately lowered their power and spirit'. Apart from farming for themselves they were hewers of wood and carriers of water, and were also prominent as masons and potters, in which crafts they 'excelled' other Ethiopians.²⁸ He states that they had constructed the roof of Iyasu II's palace at Gondar,²⁹ and added, with obvious exaggeration, that they practised the profession of thatching 'exclusively', beginning the roof at the bottom and finishing at the top.³⁰ They themselves 'lived better than the other' Ethiopians who, like their forefathers, attributed this to 'a skill in magic not to superior industry' and many believed that they turned into hyenas at night.³¹

Segregation of the Muslim and Falasha populations was decreed during a period of political anxiety by the Emperor

22. Ludolphus, p. 390.

23. Budge, Vol. II, p. 390. *Vide* also Arab-Faqih, pp. 458-9.

24. Whiteway, pp. 90, 59. *Vide* also Ludolphus, p. 73; Peiser, p. 34.

25. Peiser, p. 34.

26. Bruce, Vol. III, p. 190.

27. *ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 195.

28. *ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 190, 123; Vol. IV, pp. 275-6.

29. *ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 633-4.

30. *ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 123.

31. *ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 190; *ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 19.

Yohannes I (1667–1682) in 1668 and again in 1678, but appears to have been only partially applied.³² Poncet, as we have seen, reported in 1700 that at Emfras, for example, the Muslims had ‘public exercise of their religion’ and that their houses were ‘mixed with those of the Christians’.³³

There is reason to suppose that the Gurage population in the south also had a distinctive occupational pattern and may have served as labourers in the capital when the court was in Shoa as they were destined to do several centuries later after the establishment of Addis Ababa. Arab-Faqih, Grañ’s chronicler, states that these people and those of Damot were never soldiers and knew nothing of making war; he adds that they were only labourers, largely engaged in cutting trees and carrying wood.³⁴ Two centuries or so later during the Gondar period Bruce notes that they were constantly in attendance at royal camps, evidently in a humble capacity for he says that they had a bad reputation for stealing horses and mules. This they did with considerable ingenuity, tying a bundle of firewood to their backs which served as camouflage as they slowly crawled into the camp by night.³⁵

Bruce also mentions a certain amount of geographical specialization. Several of the northern towns, he said, were known for their manufacture of cotton cloth and parchment which they supplied to the neighbouring countryside as well as to various regions in the interior. Adowa, Aksum and Shire in particular were all famous in his day for the production of coarse cotton cloth, which was not only an important item of clothing, but also circulated in Tigre instead of money. Aksum was also renowned for the best parchment, which was made by monks from goat skins,³⁶ while Emfras was well known for its tents.³⁷

32. Guidi, *Annales Iohannis I, Iyasu I et Bakaffa*, pp. 8, 36–7.

33. Poncet, pp. 136–7.

34. Arab-Faqih, pp. 228, 243.

35. Bruce, Vol. IV, pp. 148–9. *Vide* also Pereira, *Chronica de Susneyos*, p. 26.

36. Bruce, Vol. III, pp. 123, 133, 152.

37. *ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 376; Vol. V, p. 31.

Chapter 25

'Franks' and Other Foreigners

THE NEED for foreign craftsmen and modern weapons, as well as for an alliance against Muslim enemies and invaders, caused the emperors of Ethiopia to welcome the arrival of foreigners, and especially European Christians, who were encouraged to remain in the country and indeed often retained against their will.

Yeshaq I (1414–1429) appears to have laid great emphasis on the advantages to be gained from such technicians. During his reign Turkish Mamelukes settled in Ethiopia and established workshops for making coats of mail, swords and other weapons. A former governor of Upper Egypt, Tabunga Mufriq, reorganized the Emperor's army and instructed its men in the making of 'Greek fire',¹ while a Copt from Cairo, Fakhr ad-Dowla, improved the Ethiopian system of tax collection and trained the troops.² Yeshaq's letter of 1428 to King Affonso of Aragon, which was referred to in the introduction, was not confined only to proposing an alliance against the Muslims: it also contained an appeal for skilled artisans. This was but the first of many such requests to be made by Ethiopian sovereigns in the next half-millennium. Affonso's reply is not extant, but we know that some twenty years later, in 1450, he wrote to the Emperor Zara Yaqob (1434–1468), saying that he was willing to send artisans if their safe arrival could be assured. He added that on a previous occasion (presumably in 1428) thirteen of his subjects had died on the journey.³

An interesting foreigner who arrived at about this time was referred to as Francisco, or Nicolo, Brancalone. His religious paintings, we are told, were executed in accordance with the conventions of his own country and appeared revolutionary in Ethiopia; on one occasion he painted the Virgin and Child with the baby on the left arm instead of the right which was custom-

1. A composition used in war which caught fire when moistened. Its secret was for a long time the monopoly of the Byzantine Greeks.

2. Gaudefroy-Demombynes, p. 36; Budge, Vol. I, p. 302; Trimmingham, p. 75; Wiet, p. 126.

3. *Ethiopian Itineraries*, pp. 12–16.

ary in his adopted country, but despite criticism by the clergy he received the encouragement and protection of the Emperor Zara Yaqob (1434–1468) and of his son Baeda Maryam (1468–1478), and was frequently seen at court.

Francesco Suriano, an Italian, who visited Ethiopia around 1482 during the reign of Eskender (1478–1494) relates that he and his companions met there a number of Europeans, or Franks, who had been in the country for twenty-five years. They included ten Italians ‘of good repute’, among them Neapolitans, Venetians and Genoese, a Catalan, and a Levantine from Beirut. He mentions by name one ‘Cola di Rose, romano’ – who had changed his name to Zorzi⁴ – Matteo of Piedmont, Nicolo of Mantua and the Venetian painter Nicolo Branchalio (Brancaleone).⁵ Suriano relates that he asked the foreigners why they had come to so strange a land; they replied that ‘their intention was to seek jewels and precious stones’, but ‘since the king did not allow them to return they were all ill content, although they were well rewarded and provided for by the king, each in accordance with his rank. And they were all pleased with the polite and civil intercourse’.⁶

Zorzi of the *Itineraries* also learnt something about these Europeans in his discussions with the Ethiopian ecclesiastics in Italy. The Franciscan Brother Thomas suggested that the most important among them was another Venetian painter, Bicini, to whom the Emperor had given the ‘city’ of Sogra in the province of Fatajar, it being, he said, the Prester’s policy to settle skilled persons in his country. Bicini’s land, which Crawford believes to have been near what is now Mount Meghezez, enjoyed ‘the best, freshest, most temperate and perfect air that is in all the provinces of the Presta, and it is to be seen from every point in the boundless plains. . . . In the east are just visible in the distance high mountains, and there is ever present a perfect air and gentle breezes’. According to Crawford this wonderful estate ‘must have stood on the edge of the Ethiopian plateau, commanding a view over the Hawash valley and across it to the distant mountains of Arussi’.⁷ Zorzi, who visited the painter’s daughter, Maria, in Venice, notes that her father had left that city in 1482 with

4. Not of course the same as the Zorzi of the *Itineraries*.

5. *Vide* Lavoix, p. 68.

6. *Ethiopian Itineraries*, pp. 20–1, 24.

7. *ibid.*, pp. 91, 161–3.

merchandise for Alexandria. According to Brother Thomas he had married again having several children by his Ethiopian wife, and rode with seventy horse. He was said to act as a kind of secretary to the King with whom he often resided, painting 'many things' for him, hunting and frequently playing chess and cards with him night and day. One or other of the two Venetian artists, Brancalone or Bicini, was probably responsible for the erection of the 'large and ornate organ', the presence of which in the Emperor's church caused great amazement to the Italian Suriano.⁸

One of the earliest of these foreigners to achieve prominence outside the country was, as we have seen, the Armenian trader and friar(?) Matthew, who was sent by the Empress Regent Eleni to King Manoel I of Portugal in 1509. The *Carta* records that he traded for Eleni at Massawa, Decamim and Dahlak, while Bruce states that Matthew had been 'long accustomed to go to the several kingdoms of the East upon mercantile commissions for the king and his nobles', and had visited Cairo, Jerusalem, Ormuz, Isfahan in Persia, and the Malabar coast of India.⁹

Alvares who, it will be recalled, visited the country at about the time when Zorzi was compiling his *Itineraries*, confirms that a number of Franks were resident in Ethiopia and had indeed been forbidden to return home. These included two Portuguese, João Gomes and a priest also called João, as well as Tommaso Gradani, presumably an Italian, who had been in the country for fifteen years, not having been permitted to leave. A more prominent 'detainee' was Pero de Covilhão who had left his native Portugal some forty years earlier to 'learn about Prester John and to discover where cinnamon is found'. After thirty years' forced residence in Ethiopia he understood its language and was able to act as interpreter. The artist, Brancalone, who was locally known as Macoreo or Marcoreos, had also been there for over three decades and spoke the language well. Alvares describes him as 'a very honourable person and a great gentleman, though a painter'.¹⁰

8. *ibid.*, p. 40.

9. Alvarez, pp. 264, 391, *et passim*; Bruce, Vol. II, pp. 130-1. *Vide also Historiale Description de l'Ethiopia*, p. 5; *The Discovery of Abyssinia by the Portuguese in 1520*, p. 70.

10. Alvarez, pp. 177-8, 210, 228, 264, 265, 270, 391; Bruce, Vol. II, p. 87.

Alvares elsewhere refers to some sixteen Europeans who had escaped from the Turks after being incarcerated at Jeddah with many Ethiopian captives – sixty Christians in all. Other Europeans in the country included a Greek from Chios, two Catalans, a Basque, a German, at least five or six Genoese, and a certain John from Tripoli in Syria.¹¹

The Emperor Lebna Dengel (1508–1540) informed Alvares and his companions of his desire to modernize his country with the help of foreign craftsmen. In a letter to the Portuguese King, Manoel I, which the Portuguese chaplain includes in his *Narrative*, the Emperor, echoing Yeshaq's request to King Affonso a century earlier, wrote: 'Send masters who can make figures of gold and silver, copper, iron, tin and lead, and send me lead for the churches; and masters of form to make books of our characters; and masters of gilding with gold leaf, and of making gold leaf; and this soon, and let them come to remain with me here and in my favour. And when they may wish to return at their desire, I will not detain them, and this I swear by Jesus Christ, Son of the living God.'¹²

In a letter to Diego Lopes, a member of the Portuguese mission, the Emperor declared: 'May your goodness now be fulfilled in that which I desire, and do you send me masters of working gold and silver, of making swords and weapons of iron, and helmets, and masons to make houses, and masters to make vineyards and gardens, and all other masters that are necessary and of the best arts that are named, and to make lead to cover churches and to make earthen tiles in our country, so that we may not cover our houses with thatch: of this we have great necessity, and we are very sad at not possessing them.'¹³

On learning of Manoel's death in 1521, Lebna Dengel wrote to his son, João III: 'Sir, brother, hear another word now, I want you to send me men, artificers to make images and printed books, and to make swords and arms of all sorts for fighting; and also masons and carpenters, and men who make medicines, and physicians, and surgeons to cure illnesses; also artificers to beat gold and place it, and goldsmiths and silversmiths, and men who know how to extract gold and silver and also copper from the

11. Alvarez, pp. 174, 330, 352.

12. *ibid.*, p. 395.

13. *ibid.*, pp. 370–1.

veins, and men who can make sheet lead and earthenware; and masters of any trades which are necessary in these kingdoms, also gunsmiths. Assist me in this, which I beg of you as a brother does to a brother, and God will assist you and save you from evil things.’¹⁴

During the period of Grañ’s wars life was probably rendered insecure for foreign civilians, particularly Christians, though his chronicler mentions the presence at Zerarah market (in Shoa?) of Christian merchants from Egypt and Syria. As we have seen, a number of foreigners, mainly Turks, Arabs, Portuguese, and a few Indians, served as archers, musketeers, cannoneers and boat-builders. Arab-Faqih states that forty Franks assisted the Emperor by building boats to enable his army to cross the Hawash.¹⁵ Bermudes claims that he brought with him from India in 1541 a force of technicians which comprised ‘over seventy persons trained in all trades, namely cross-bow makers, blacksmiths, carpenters, masons, shoemakers, armourers and other handicraftsmen’.¹⁶

After Grañ’s defeat in 1543 the number of foreigners and especially Franks appears to have been considerably above the prewar figure. No fewer than one hundred and twenty of the Portuguese remained in the country,¹⁷ and assumed, among foreign residents, a dominant role which they were not to relinquish until their expulsion in 1633. The Emperor Galawdewos (1540–1559) gave these and other aliens many lands¹⁸ and utilized their services in the post-war period. The chronicle of his reign states that when he established a fixed capital in the area of Wadj, he employed Syrian and Armenian artists and European and Egyptian craftsmen to build a large and beautiful tower, the interior of which was decorated with figures covered in gold and silver, an ornate palace surrounded by a strong wall, and an irrigated garden for the public.¹⁹ Reference is also made to the arrival of foreigners from ‘Rome (Constantinople?), Europe, Greece, Syria, Kueredj (Georgia) and Pentapolis’ (Cyrenaica).²⁰ Galawdewos refers to these and other ‘Franks’ in a letter

14. *ibid.*, p. 399.

15. Arab-Faqih, pp. 251–2, 234.

16. Whiteway, pp. xli, 274.

17. *ibid.*, p. 102.

18. Perruchon, *Le Règne de Galawdewos*, p. 266.

19. Conzelman, pp. 149–50.

20. *ibid.*, p. 158.

of 1550 to King João III of Portugal. 'The Franks who are here,' he writes, 'live with me at their pleasure; they have much property and riches, which I have given them where they desired it.' After the death of their chief Ayres Dias, locally known as Marcos, the Emperor appointed Gaspar de Sousa to a position of trust; he relates that he was pleased to see that the latter 'very speedily' carried out all that was required of him. His brother, Fernão de Sousa, whose task it was to welcome visitors from foreign parts, received them 'with good will, and served me well'. He had therefore given him 'much land and property and made him Commander of my guard and a trusted leader'.²¹

The foreign community's debt to Galawdewos was partially repaid some twelve years' later by an unknown Armenian trader. It is related that when Galawdewos was killed in 1559 by Nur Ibn al Wazir, the son of Grañ's sister, his head was cut off and placed at the feet of Grañ's widow, Bati Del Wanbara, who had promised to marry Nur if he avenged her husband's death: the body of the sovereign was then suspended on a tree before her door where it remained for three years until it was purchased by the above-mentioned Armenian who had it interred in the holy sepulchre of St. Claudius at Antioch.²² Next to the Arabs and Muslims, Ludolphus says, the Armenians carried 'the greatest Trade' as they differed but slightly from the Ethiopians in their 'Forms of Worship' and were 'great Dealers in all parts of the World'.²³

Sartsa Dengel (1563-1597) shared his predecessors' interest in obtaining Franks for his kingdom. He wrote to King Felipe II of Spain on 9 February 1598 asking him to send out experienced workmen who knew how to make helmets and cannon and to prepare gunpowder and other war material.²⁴ He later gave Jorge Nogueira and a number of other Portuguese valuable lands, including some at Nanina on the borders of Gojam and the country of the Agaos, while according to one legend he employed two Frenchmen, Garneau and Arnaud, to build his palace at Guzara, their names being perpetuated in those of two rivers by the estates he gave them.²⁵ His brother Za Dengel

21. Whiteway, p. 118.

22. Bruce, Vol. II, p. 203.

23. Ludolphus, pp. 309-1.

24. Ludolphus, *Commentarius*, pp. 484-5.

25. Monti della Corte, *I Castelli di Gondar*, pp. 66-7; Lejean, p. 6.

(1603-1604) subsequently wrote to King Felipe III of Spain on 26 June 1604, in similar vein, asking him to send many artisans and soldiers quickly, 'so that peace and love should take root between us who are united in the faith of Christ: and that this world which belongs to the Blessed Virgin Mary and Christ our Redeemer should not be lost'.²⁶ At about this time Almeida notes, as we have seen, that the rich Ethiopians wore caps worked in silk or gold by Turkish tailors 'who were few in number but the only ones in the land'.²⁷

One of the more interesting Franks during the period of the Portuguese was the Jesuit Pero Pais who came early in the seventeenth century. Arriving at Fremona in 1603 he found that members of his order, who had preceded him, so far from introducing the technological improvements which so many emperors had appealed for in previous centuries, were living in *tukuls*²⁸ like Ethiopian peasants. Father Melchior da Silva, the head of the mission, for example, dwelt in a round hut a mere twenty palms in diameter with a low thatched roof and containing only a single room. Pais at once determined to show the Ethiopians the advantages of modern forms of construction. In his *History of Ethiopia* he suggests that the country was in need of an architectural renaissance for the churches built after the great wars with Grañ were smaller and meaner than those of earlier times. He based this argument on an examination of the ruins of earlier buildings which he was able to measure, as well as on the descriptions of Alvares.²⁹ Thus the ruined walls of the Hallelujah monastery, six to eight leagues from St. Mary of Sion at Aksum, measured 132 palms by 105 palms, but the friars now lived in a much smaller building. The old church of St. Mary had similarly been replaced by a much smaller church which had been built within its circuit.

The Portuguese writers of the seventeenth century devote considerable attention to the work of Pero Pais as a builder. His greatest achievement in this field was the famous castle of Mariam Gemb (edifice of Mary) which was erected at Gorgora between 1619 and 1621 on a site overlooking Lake Tana.³⁰ Telles relates that soon after the Emperor Susneyos (1607-1632)

26. Ludolphus, p. 487.

27. Almeida, p. 61.

28. The traditional Ethiopian huts.

29. Pais, Vol. II, p. 125.

30. *Guida dell' Africa Orientale Italiana*, p. 367; Monti della Corte, *La Chiesa Portoghese di Gorgora, passim*.

returned to his camp at Gorgora in May 1614 the Jesuit Father 'resolv'd to build him a Palace after the European Manner, to oblige him and show the Ethiopians that what they reported of the Palaces and Monasteries in Europe was not impossible, as they believ'd. He was encourag'd to it by finding in that Place a Quarry of very good white Stone, and therefore presently gave directions for making Hammers, Mallets, Chizzels and all other Necessary Tools, handling them himself, and teaching the new workmen to dig, hew and square the Stones for the Fabric; and the same he did as to all the Joiners, and Carpenters. Still he wanted lime, and found no Stone proper to make it, and therefore made use of a binding sort of Clay. He rais'd large, and strong walls, fac'd both within and without with Square Stones, well wrought and joined so that the buildings being finish'd, might have serv'd any Prince in Europe for a Country House. Among the Rest, there was one fair Room about 50 Foot long, and 15 in Breadth, and on the same Floor, a square Bedchamber, with a spacious Stair Case in the Middle, from the lower to the upper Floor and from that another which ascended to the flat Roof of the House, about which was a handsome Parapet. At the Top of the Stairs was a little Room, like a Closet, which the Emperor was much pleas'd with because from it he had the distant View of all that great lake, and the adjacent Country, and saw at hand all that came in, and out, without being himself discover'd by any Body. The Father put a sort of Spring Lock upon the Door of the Stairs that went out upon the Top of the House which the Emperor said would be better alter'd that he might not always stand in need of the Key to open it, but Father Pays answer'd Your Majesty may have occasion for it as it is. . . . This Building amaz'd all the Abyssines who came from the remotest Parts to behold it and what most surpriz'd them was to see an upper Floor and having no Name to express it by they call'd it *Babet Laybet*,³¹ that is, a House upon a House. This Work gain'd the Fathers much Reputation, convincing the People, that what they told them of the mighty Structures of Europe was true.'³²

Telles is obviously here guilty of some exaggeration for the Ethiopians were undoubtedly aware of houses of more than one

31. *Ba-bet-lay yalla bet*.

32. Tellez, pp. 206-7. *Vide also Lettere Annue di Ethiopia*, p. 212.

story. Traditionally they had existed in various parts, notably Tigre, while more recently an imposing two-story castle had been erected at Guzara by Sartsa Dengel (1563-1597) well before Pais set foot in Ethiopia.³³

Almeida, describing the Jesuit establishment at Fremona reconstructed by Pais, observed: 'It has seven or eight bastions with high curtain walls, two courtyards, one of which adjoins the houses, where a good stone tank has been made, and another where a beautiful church was being built of stone and lime. Here there was a curtain wall and a very high bastion.' Discussing the strategic importance of these latter erections, he added: 'This is a big commanding position, for it is so much higher that it exposes the greater part of the fort to musketry fire. In Ethiopia, however, guns have not been much used hitherto and, although they have a good number of muskets, they handle them so badly that they do not fight much with them. So this small fortification, with twenty or thirty muskets, a small cannon and the sons of Portugal manning them, was held in Ethiopia to be a unique and impregnable place.'³⁴

Pais himself relates that when the Emperor saw a small church he had built in Dambea he promised to give the Jesuits more land on which to build a larger one. Subsequently he gave them an estate three leagues from the court at Gorgora from which spot they could look out over Lake Tana. Describing this church he declares: 'I noticed that the Emperor would like to see a specimen of our churches and how they are built. So I tried to build one as well as I could. It is all built of cantaria. It was small, 72 palms long and 28 palms broad, but that is only the main body of the church. There is also a chapel outside the church 32 palms long and 24 palms wide. This chapel and the sacristy are built of very good red stone. The church is of white stone, very well carved. The façade and the side doors are decorated with 8 columns, and their capitals and bases and the frieze are so well carved that everyone who sees them says it is not a work done on earth, but in heaven. There is a choir, a good piece of wood-carving.'

This church, appears to have been built in March 1620, seventeen years after Pais arrived in Ethiopia and two years

33. *Vide* Monti della Corte, pp. 10-110.

34. Almeida, p. 186.

before the Emperor's conversion to Roman Catholicism. When the latter visited it he was so pleased that he presented his finest carpet and a hundred *cruzados* to pay for its ornament and declared that Pais should build another church in the same style on a more imposing site.³⁵

Telles relates that a few years later, in 1626, occurred 'the solemnity of the dedication of the new church built at Gorgora with Lime and Stone where the Vestry and Choir being vaulted, and many Roses curiously cut in white Stone, the Abyssines, who had never before seen a Stone Roof came from very far to admire this strange work'.³⁶

Foreigners of other nationalities were also active in this reign and may indeed have been no less important than the Portuguese. According to the Emperor's chronicle an Indian 'Banian' called Abd el Kerim received orders from the Empress to build a palace at the temporary capital of Dancaz, the head workman being an Egyptian, Sadaqa Nesrani, whose assistants came from Egypt and Rome, i.e. Constantinople. The Banians, it may be added, were Hindu merchants mainly centred on Gujarat, Diu, Cambay and Surat, who traded widely in the Red Sea area and enjoyed a pre-eminence in Indian foreign trade comparable only to that of the Jews and Armenians in other parts of the world.³⁷

Reference has already been made to the discovery by one of the craftsmen brought by the Portuguese from India of a type of Ethiopian stone suitable for the manufacture of mortar. This discovery, which Almeida believes to have taken place in the sixteen twenties, was undoubtedly of great importance as the Ethiopians had hitherto been unable to cement stones together. The builders of Aksum and Lalibela had largely solved the problem by the erection of their famous monolithic stele and churches, but such edifices were feats of art requiring immense skill and labour and could only be attempted in areas where suitable stone was available. The building of bridges also was greatly facilitated by the use of mortar, the first stone bridge being indeed built, as we have seen, by the above-mentioned Indian, Abd el Kerim.

In 1633 the Jesuits were expelled for their political intrigues discussed in an earlier chapter. Ludolphus, who wrote his *New*

35. Pais, Vol. II, pp. 132-3.

36. Telles, p. 234. *Vide* also Perruchon, *Règne de Susneyos*, p. 184.

37. Pereira, *Chronica de Susneyos*, pp. 224, 566-7.

History of Ethiopia while this event was still fresh in the minds of his readers, emphasized, on the basis of his conversations with Gregory, that the Ethiopians were nonetheless anxious to increase foreign contacts. The people, he explained, were ‘most Covetous after Learning and desirous of the knowledge of Arts and Sciences’.³⁸ As evidence of this fact he referred to the already-mentioned letter of Lebna Dengel to João III of Portugal ‘wherein he desired the King to send him Printers, Armorers, Cutters, Physicians, Chirurgians, Architects, Carpenters, Goldsmiths, Miners, Bricklayers and Jewellers’. That the spirit of Lebna Dengel was still alive could be seen from the fact that when Ernestus, Duke of Saxony, asked Gregory what ‘the King of Habessinia most desired out of Europe’, the learned Ethiopian had replied: ‘Arts and Handicraft Trades; well understanding that neither Merchandize nor any other calling could well be followed without the help of the Workmans Tool.’³⁹

After the expulsion of the Jesuits Indian craftsmen, as we have seen, were used to good advantage in building the Fasiladas castle, the first of a number of such edifices at Gondar. At about this time, 1637, a Lutheran missionary, Peter Heiling (sometimes called Peter Heyling or Peter Leo), arrived from Lübeck in Germany. Ludolphus records that he ‘took up his abode in a Church, not far from the Court: And as soon as he was settled in his new Mansion, he began to practice Physick, and profess the Instruction of Youth in the Greek and Hebrew Tongues, wherein he quickly became so famous that even the Principal Nobility accounted it a singular Privilege to have their Sons educated under his Tuition’. He soon won the good favour of the Emperor Fasiladas, was raised to a position of trust and was pressed to accept a ‘delightful Apartment’ and a large revenue. He reminded the Emperor of the ‘deplorable Troubles’ occasioned by the Jesuits and ‘Popish Emissaries’, and warned him of the ‘sudden approach of others on the same Errand’; but he was subsequently killed by the Pasha of Suakin while trying to make his way to Cairo in 1654.⁴⁰ Sometime in the sixteen forties Fasiladas acquired the services of Gosia Murad, a circumcised Christian Armenian from Syria, who is sometimes referred to as

38. Ludolphus, *A New History of Ethiopia*, p. 70.

39. *ibid.*, p. 392.

40. Ludolphus, preface, pp. xxv, et seq. *Vide* also Ludolphus, *Commentarius*, pp. 551-4; Monti della Corte, pp. 79-89; Flemming, p. 102.

Morad, Murat and Amurat. Acting partly as the Emperor's 'ambassador' and partly as his trade agent, Murad also traded on his own account and travelled widely in the East. In the early sixteen sixties he served as Ethiopian 'ambassador' to the Mugul Emperor Aurangzib.⁴¹ Apparently well trusted by Fasiladas he subsequently became the 'minister' of Yohannes I (Alaf Sagad, 1667-1682) on whose behalf he took costly gifts, including four horses and two 'striped asses of the woods' (zebras), as a sign of friendship to Jan Maetzuyker, governor of the Dutch East India Company in the East, bringing back many brightly coloured robes, some of them Chinese garments of gold brocade, six Persian scrolls of silk, several skilfully ornamented cannon, and 'enough pepper, indeed, for his household'.⁴²

The Emperor Yohannes I further endeavoured to rid the country of Catholic influences by decreeing in 1668 the expulsion of all Franks except those who had been admitted into the Ethiopian church.⁴³

A significant Portuguese half-caste population still existed at this time, though it was becoming more and more identified with the Ethiopian people. Just over half a century after the departure of the Jesuits in 1633 a Portuguese priest of Indian origin, Melchior de Silva, entered Ethiopia disguised as a merchant. In a letter of 5 August 1695, to the Archbishop of Goa, he reported that the half-castes did not retain anything of Europe except their pale skins and had everything in common with the Ethiopians; they were all in fact Ethiopians by language and custom; few spoke Portuguese and none of them would solemnly say, 'we are Catholic sons of the Portuguese'; though there was some talk of their leaving for India via Dahlak and he believed a force of perhaps two hundred soldiers might be recruited among them. This project, he declared, was a heroic work in the service of God, as it would prevent the extinction of the race.⁴⁴

Iyasu I (1682-1706) who, according to Poncet, was a sovereign of 'quick and piercing wit',⁴⁵ was anxious, like his forebears, to attract foreign technicians from Europe, as well as to foster the

41. Beccari, Vol. XIV, pp. 116, 49; *ibid.*, Vol. XV, p. 245; Poncet, p. 190; Manucci, Vol. II, pp. 109-14; Bernier, pp. 133-42.

42. Ludolphus, *Commentarius*, pp. 244-5, 261; Guidi, *Annales Iohannis I, Iyasu I et Bakaffa*, p. 39.

43. Guidi, *Annales Iohannis I, Iyasu I et Bakaffa*, p. 8.

44. Beccari, Vol. I, pp. 413 et seq.; Monti della Corte, pp. 75-6.

45. Poncet, p. 131.

development of his country in other ways. The French consul at Cairo, M. de Maillet, observes in a letter of 24 September 1701, that Iyasu had made a request for 'clever workmen to re-establish the arts', notably a chief engineer, a cannon maker, an armourer, a glass maker, a gardener, and a good doctor or surgeon, as well as several architects, masons, carpenters and locksmiths.⁴⁶ The importance of this request is underlined in a further letter of de Maillet, dated 15 September 1703, in which he reports that the Emperor's neighbour, the King of Sennar, had sent emissaries to Cairo to make considerable purchases of cannon, powder, lead and other necessities of war. The King, he added, had already in his employ a number of Europeans, including a Portuguese cannon-maker who also made powder, a Greek cannoneer and another Greek who was instructing the soldiers of Sennar in the use of firearms.⁴⁷ We have, however, no record of the response to the Emperor's request, though it is known that at about this time he took into his service a Greek physician called Demetrius.⁴⁸

Iyasu I's desire to modernize is evident not only from his attempts to import foreign experts, but also from the keen interest which he took in Poncet's medical work, hoping to profit by it. 'I had carried with me into Aethiopia', the Frenchman wrote, 'a little chest of chymical medicines, which had cost me the labour of six or seven years. The Emperor inform'd himself exactly after what manner those remedies were prepar'd, and how they were to be applied; what effects they produc'd: for what distempers they were proper. He was not satisfied with only a verbal account of these things, but he order'd it to be taken in writing. But what I most admir'd was that he seem'd to be extremely pleas'd with the physical reasons I gave him of everything. I taught him the composition of a kind of bezoar,⁴⁹ which I always made use of with great success in intermitting fevers, as the Emperor and two of the princes his sons experienc'd. He was also curious to see after what manner I extracted essences. Upon this project he sent me to Tzamba, a monastery situated on the river Reb [i.e. to the west of Lake Tana]. . . . There I set up my stoves, and prepar'd all that was necessary. The Emperor came

46. Beccari, Vol. XIV, p. 178.

47. *ibid.*, Vol. XIV, pp. 341-2.

48. *ibid.*, Vol. XIV, pp. 348-9, 486.

49. Bezoar stones were calcareous concretions found in the bodies of certain animals, especially goats, and chiefly used as antidotes to poisons.

thither incognito. I made several experiments in his presence, and communicated to him many secrets, which he was wonderfully curious to know.⁵⁰

Not content with merely watching such experiments the Emperor agreed to Poncet's suggestion which, as we have seen, was inspired by political considerations, that a dozen children of the Ethiopian nobility should be dispatched abroad for education in Paris. The scheme, so much in advance of its time, was, however, destined to failure. Three young men and four young women set off with Poncet on his return to Europe, but were seized by the Pasha of Jeddah and were never heard of again.⁵¹

Because of the reluctance or inability of Ethiopian Christians to trade in Muslim countries Iyasu also followed the policy of appointing foreigners to undertake overseas commercial transactions on his behalf. De Maillet suggests that the Naib of Arkiko had formerly sent traders to Gondar but that they had attempted to seek out the country's gold mines, and had therefore been replaced by foreign officials who operated directly under the Emperor's orders.⁵² One of these men was Haji Ali, a Turk who traded in India, Persia, Egypt and Arabia, and, who in 1698 on his third visit to Cairo brought with him no less than five hundred thousand *écus*⁵³ worth of gold, civet and ambergris.⁵⁴ Another of the Emperor's trading emissaries was the above-mentioned Gosia Murad, whose operations extended to Egypt, Syria, India and the Dutch East Indies. For many years he supplied Iyasu with clothes and other articles from Egypt and India. It is recorded that he brought the Emperor two large bronze bells from Batavia which he visited for the third time in 1696; these were subsequently hung at the church of Dabra Berhan⁵⁵ at Gondar.

Murad, who had thus served no fewer than three emperors, lived for over a hundred years, more than sixty of them in the service of Ethiopian rulers. Poncet says that Iyasu treated the old Armenian with great consideration, and, using the Turkish or Egyptian Arabic term, called him Baba or Father Murad.⁵⁶ In the sixteen nineties he was joined by his nephew, a young

50. Poncet, pp. 131-2.

51. Budge, Vol. II, p. 423; Bruce, Vol. II, p. 479.

52. Beccari, Vol. XIV, pp. 30-1.

53. *Ecu*, a French silver crown piece.

54. *ibid.*, Vol. XIV, p. 31. *Vide* also p. 508; Poncet, pp. 93, 168.

55. Flemming, p. 553; Budge, Vol. II, p. 414.

56. Beccari, Vol. XIV, p. 116; Poncet, pp. 133-4, 140.



Above: At table. Note masobs, or basket tables. The woman on the left is carrying water in an earthenware jar and food in a skin bag. (From an eighteenth century MS., British Museum Orient 590.)

Below: A drinking party. Note the large earthenware jars containing drink. (From a late seventeenth century MS., British Museum Orient 645.)





Above: Banquet table with injera, or pancake bread, laid on it; the dishes would contain wat, or sauce, into which the injera was dipped. Below: Drink being served. (From an eighteenth century MS., British Museum Orient 723.)



Camel with pack. (From an eighteenth century MS., British Museum Orient 590.)

man from Aleppo of the same name who is also known as Murad ibn Madlum. Following in his uncle's footsteps he served as Iyasu's representative to Egypt in 1701-3 and was also appointed as an emissary to King Louis XIV of France.⁵⁷

On arriving at the capital in 1699 Poncet learnt more about the Emperor's trade policy and his apparent fear of foreign penetration. He was informed that 'the Hollanders had attempted more than once to engage in commerce with the Aethiopians. But whether it be difference in religion or whether it be the great power of the Hollanders in the East Indies that gives them a jealousy 'tis certain that the Aethiopians would never enter into any league with them'. The French text adds: 'and I have heard them say that they would never trust any Christians who did not fast, or invoke the saints, or believe that Christ is present in the holy sacrament,' a sentence which the English translation of Poncet's work omitted.

'The English', he continued, 'are also desirous of making alliance with the Aethiopians, and to my knowledge an Armenian merchant did associate himself to the English in hopes to trade thither; which wou'd be of great advantage to them, for, besides gold, civet, elephants' teeth, etc., they wou'd bring from thence aloes, myrrh, cassia, tamarinds, and coffee, which the Aethiopians do not esteem much, and which (as I have been told) was transported out of Aethiopia into Hiemen (Yaman) or Arabia Felix, from whence the merchants nowadays bring it, for at present they cultivate it only as a curiosity.'⁵⁸ The Armenian, called either Agapyri or Agrappi, a merchant well known in India, was unsuccessful in the venture, as Poncet reported to de Maillet in December 1700 with obvious satisfaction. It appears that Agapyri had met in India a Greek agent of the Emperor's who had been sent there to obtain a passage for England, presumably in order to investigate trading possibilities. This Greek abandoning his mission persuaded Agapyri to go to Massawa in an English ship offering to prepare the ground for him at Gondar in exchange for a loan of seven hundred crowns. The Greek obtained the money and set off for Gondar but failed to return. We hear no more of Agapyri and must assume that he aban-

57. Beccari, Vol. XIV, pp. 155, 345; *ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 179 n; *ibid.*, Vol. XV, pp. 244-5; Poncet, pp. 140, 190.

58. Poncet, pp. 154-5.

doned his project. The Ethiopian monks at Gondar had not forgotten the Jesuits; Poncet reports that on learning of the arrival of the English vessel at Massawa they were vociferous in their disapproval; fearing foreign intervention they 'made a terrible disturbance before the palace of the Negus.'⁵⁹

The foreign community increased during the reign of Iyasu II (1730-1755) when a number of Greek refugees from Smyrna arrived at Gondar. Bruce states that they had set forth for India, but having missed the monsoon and being short of money had come to the Ethiopian capital by way of Jeddah and Massawa. They included twelve silversmiths, excellent in filigree work, who were 'all received very readily by the King, liberally furnished both with necessities and luxuries, and employed in his palace as their own taste directed them'. After working on the palace, as we have seen, the demand for their services declined, and, after the Emperor's death they were mainly occupied in ornamenting saddles, bridles, swords and other military items, for which, we are told, they were 'very ill paid'.⁶⁰

Other foreigners, especially Armenians, were also to be found in the Emperor's service. In 1751 an Egyptian called Ani was appointed *Bajerond* at the palace.⁶¹ One Armenian, whose name is now lost, subsequently achieved notoriety. He was said to have understood Turkish, Arabic and Malabar, as well as Amharic and Tigrinya, and was employed while a young man on errands for the sovereign to Massawa and Arabia. On Iyasu's death he was made a Gentleman of the Bedchamber to Iyoas I (1755-1769) and was later promoted to the rank of *Blattengeta*, or Master of the Household. He commanded one of the four units of the Emperor's household troops and acquired some reputation as a judge, but was later deported for attempting the assassination of Ras Mikael on his master's behalf.⁶² Iyoas also employed a number of Greek fusiliers, who were highly privileged, as well as a Greek chamberlain called Petros who came from Rhodes.⁶³

The Greek community was still active at the time of Bruce's visit, 1768-1773. He records that before arriving in Ethiopia he had been informed by Mark, the Greek Patriarch in Cairo, that

59. *ibid.*, p. 169.

60. Bruce, Vol. II, pp. 633-4.

61. *ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 666-7, 705-6.

62. Guidi, *Annales regum Iyasu II et Iyoas*, p. 164.

63. Bruce, Vol. III, pp. 549, 489.

there were about twenty members of his communion in Ethiopia. 'Some of them', the Patriarch said, 'were good men and becoming rich in the way of trade; some of them had fled from the severity of the Turks after having been detected by them in intimacy with Mahometan women; but all of them were in a great degree of credit at the court of Abyssinia, and possessing places under government greatly beyond his expectation'.⁶⁴ The most trusted among them was Janni of Adowa who was the brother of the above Petros and had charge of all customs posts in Tigre. Bruce describes him as 'a man of the first character for good life and morals'. He had served two Kings of Abyssinia with great reputation, and Ras Mikael, the governor of Tigre, had appointed him to the customs house at Adowa to superintend the revenue there while he himself was occupied at Gondar.⁶⁵ All the Greeks, we are told, held 'considerable posts' and were both proud and vain. They included Janni's son-in-law, Anthule, master of the Emperor's wardrobe, Sabastos, a cook in the Emperor's service, Francisco, one of the royal servants, Abba Armaxikos, a priest who also acted as a physician, a number of Muslim converts who had been in Arabia, India or Egypt and served as riflemen, and some craftsmen from Smyrna who had made the Emperor's crown. Petros was no longer in the royal service; he had become a trader and dealt in carpets and other merchandise.⁶⁶

Armenians, Bruce adds, were also engaged in trade and were employed as factors by the great men of the land. 'Of all the people in the East,' they were the 'most remarkable for their patience and sobriety.' They were 'generally masters of most of the eastern languages' and were 'the most attentive' to beasts and merchandise in their care, being moreover 'exceedingly faithful, and content with little'. They were therefore preferred to Greeks, though both nationalities were often engaged in similar enterprise. Both paid a capitulation to the Ottoman Empire, whose subjects they were, in return for which they obtained passports, protection and freedom to trade throughout that empire, being thus exempt from the 'insults and extortions' of the Turkish officials to which other foreigners were exposed.⁶⁷

64. *ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 11.

65. *ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 11-12, 86, 120, 131.

66. *ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 187, 210-11, 213, 225, 231, 264, 405, 435, 490, 545; Vol. IV, pp. 208, 95, 201, 210, 251, 274.

67. *ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 131.

Arab merchants also played an important role in the economy often while residing in Arabia. 'The richest of all Muslims,' they frequently acted as 'the bankers of the gebertis' whom they furnished with both funds and merchandise, occasionally crossing over to Ethiopia 'to recover their debts and renew their correspondence with merchants of the country'.⁶⁸

It will be apparent from the above account that throughout the period covered in this work the presence of Europeans or Franks tended to diminish the general isolation of Ethiopia and to impress the country's rulers with the possibility of technological progress such as was achieved in other lands. Many of the foreigners who resided in the country played an important rôle in its economy without permanently affecting the way of life, as they were mainly craftsmen or traders who worked on an exclusive basis without instructing the inhabitants of the country in their trades or professions. The renaissance which accompanied the building of Gondar may have owed some of its inspiration to the earlier building innovations of Pais, as well as to the invaluable discovery of mortar, but, as we have seen, it did not in fact begin until after the Jesuits were expelled.

68. *ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 11.

Chapter 26

Internal Trade and Trade Routes

AT THE end of the thirteenth century Marco Polo claimed that there was a 'class of merchants' in Ethiopia 'living by trade'.¹ Though we lack the documentation to corroborate his statement it is obvious that Ethiopian commerce was in a flourishing state two centuries later on the eve of Grañ's invasion when more accurate reports began to reach the outside world. This is apparent from such sources as Zorzi's informants, the first Portuguese mission, and a number of Red Sea travellers who describe the trade of the principal ports of East Africa in some detail.

Ethiopian internal trade was based on fairs or markets of varying importance which existed all over the country. Alvares says that in all the chief towns there was a 'great fair' every week where the people of the locality could buy everything they wished: cows and mules, fowls, capons, salt, incense, pepper, myrrh, camphor and various small articles. Trade was generally based not on cash sales but on barter. When the two articles to be exchanged were not of equal value the difference would often be made up by measures of bread.²

Manadeley in Tigre, he says, was 'a town of very great trade like a great city or seaport' where it was possible to purchase 'all the merchandise that there is in the world'. There was a fair every day and the goods for sale were 'as many as can be named'. Over and above local produce there was 'merchandise from all parts' brought in by 'merchants of all nations' who had travelled there by caravan. They included 'Moors, from Giada (Jeddah), from Morocco, Fez, Bugia, Tunis, Turks, Roumys,³ Greeks, Moors from India, Ormuz, and Cairo'. The importance of this trade may be gathered from the fact that the Emperor levied there an annual tax of no less than a thousand *oqueas* of gold.⁴

1. Marco Polo, pp. 251-2.

2. Alvarez, p. 62.

3. Roumys, Rumes, inhabitants of Constantinople, the second Rome, or more loosely Turks of the Ottoman Empire. *Vide* Pires, p. 22 n.

4. Alvarez, p. 104.

The part played by the Church in the economy of this time is illustrated by the remark of Alvares that 'the principal merchants' – presumably in agricultural produce – at many of these fairs were 'priests, friars and nuns'.⁵ Directly by purchase or indirectly as legacies or gifts, the churches obtained large numbers of costly fabrics imported from Arabia, India, Egypt, and elsewhere; they served as repositories for the accumulated wealth of the nation. Thus Alvares mentions that the church of Barra in the north was 'handsomely ornamented with many brocades, crimson silks, Mekkah velvets and red camlets'.⁶ ⁷ Describing the 'very splendid' coloured umbrellas carried by the clergy at religious ceremonies, he says: 'I had seen many large and splendid ones in India, but never had I seen any of this sort.'⁸ Brother Raphael of Aksum told Zorzi that his country's churches were 'of great worth' and often vaulted and adorned with pictures painted with colouring materials dug up from the ground.⁹ Grañ's chronicler, Arab Faqih, was no less impressed by the treasures found in the many churches subsequently looted by his master. Concerning the destruction at the church at Makana Sellassie, he writes with probable exaggeration: 'He himself (i.e. Ahmad Grañ) arrived at Makana Sellassie, and penetrated into it with admiration. He entered with his companions, and in contemplating it they almost lost the power of sight. The interior was ornamented with sheets of gold and silver on which had been placed incrustations of pearls. The wooden doorway was ten cubits long and four wide; it was covered with sheets of gold and silver, and over the gold had been placed incrustations in various colours. The church was one hundred cubits long; the width as much as its height, over one hundred and fifty cubits; the ceiling and the interior courts were covered with sheets of gold and ornamented with golden statues(?). The Muslims were amazed at this work . . . they crowded in and he said to them: "What any man takes shall be for himself, except for the sheets." They set to work with a thousand axes, tearing down the gold and also the incrustations which were inside the church, from mid-afternoon till night. Each man took as much gold as he wished for, and was rich for ever. More

5. *ibid.*, p. 62. *Vide* also p. 95.

6. A type of cloth, originally made of camel hair.

7. *ibid.*, p. 61. *Vide* also p. 236.

8. *ibid.*, p. 231.

9. *Ethiopian Itineraries*, p. 143.

than a third of the gold was then burnt with the church.¹⁰

The chronicler, as has been seen, also relates that the church of Atronsa Mariam was pillaged from midday till the following morning. The invaders tore out rich brocaded velvets and silks, gold and silver in heaps, gold and silver cups, dishes and censers, a gold *tabot*¹¹ on four feet weighing over a thousand ounces, an illuminated Bible bound in sheets of gold, and innumerable other riches. Neither in the country of Roum (i.e. Turkey) nor in India, declared the Arabs who accompanied the army, had they seen anything comparable; such splendour 'did not exist anywhere else in the world'.¹²

The Ethiopian monks provided Zorzi with some information about the most frequented trade routes. Brother Thomas, the Franciscan, mentioned an important trading centre in Shoa called Durbit or Turbit(?) where, he said, there were three main fairs a year. Merchants, who, as we have seen, were mainly Muslims, came from all parts of the country and set up their pavilions and tents: they included men from Damot in the south-west carrying gold and silk (cotton?)¹³ which was very dear in the province of Adal; men from Bali¹⁴ in the east, and from Gojam in the west, the latter bringing gold, silver, jewels(?) and pearls(?), horses and mules, and divers medicinal herbs and roots, as well as cloth of silk and of another sort made from a certain tree (presumably cotton) 'great with white leaves(?), like a pomegranate', which bore a fruit the size of a fist. There were also 'very evil' merchants from Tigre and 'good people' from the country of the Agao.¹⁵

Political developments on the coast and elsewhere necessarily led, as we shall see, to considerable changes in trade routes during the period under review. The Dominican Brother Thomas of Barara in Shoa, whom Zorzi interviewed in 1524, emphasized the primary importance at that time of the northern route to Massawa. He said that this port was used by the Portuguese who had established a 'strong castle' there which enabled them to

10. Quoted in Pankhurst, pp. 328-9. *Vide* also Arab-Faqih, pp. 194, 215, 217, 220, 245, 249, 272, 284-5, 310-18, 329-31, 337, 424 *et passim*.

11. The tablet usually of wood or stone, placed in the church's 'holy of holies' to symbolize the Ark of the Covenant.

12. Arab-Faqih, p. 311. *Vide* also Conzelman, p. 123.

13. There is no evidence that silk was produced in Ethiopia.

14. Bali is identified by Crawford as the lower region of the Hawash between Mount Ayelu on the north and the railway station of Awash to the east.

15. *Ethiopian Itineraries*, pp. 151-3.

prevent spices from reaching the Arab port of Jeddah, and also facilitated their own sale of this commodity in Prester John's domains.¹⁶ The chief market for spices in this area was Aksum, 'one of the greatest cities' of the region, which he called with perhaps some exaggeration, 'another and greater Rome', declaring that its buildings were ancient and wondrous and its stelae as great as the campanile of San Marco in Venice.

Merchandise from the coast was transported to the other provinces of the empire along a trade route which owed considerable importance to the 'many cities to the right and left' as far as Barara and Wis,¹⁷ two places where goods were stored as in mercantile Venice. In both these cities, he added, there were 'great warehouses' run by the Florentine, Andrea Corsali, who intended to add to his trading activities by printing Ethiopic books.¹⁸ Grañ's chronicler, Arab-Faqih, who also mentions these cities a generation later, says that there were many Muslims at Barara and that Wis was without equal in Abyssinia as a trading centre, all transactions there being carried out in gold.¹⁹

The importance of the Massawa route was confirmed at about the same time by Alvares who reported that it was often thronged with traders travelling to and from the coast. 'No one passes by this road', he says, 'except in *cafila* (*kafila*, or caravan) which they call *negada*.²⁰ This assemblage passes twice a week, once in coming and another time returning, or to express it better one goes and the other comes; and there always pass a thousand persons and upwards, with a captain of the *negada* who awaits them in certain places. There are two captains, because the *negada* commences in two parts, and they set out from one end and from the other. These *negadas* have their origin in two fairs, namely, Manadeley and Corcora (Qorqora) of Angote.'²¹

Alvares elsewhere recounts that when the Portuguese emissaries were about to return to the coast on their way home to Portugal they halted at Dinguel to join a caravan which assembled each week on Monday night or Tuesday morning. They found it was made up of fully two thousand people who

16. *ibid.*, p. 189.

17. According to Crawford Vis can be identified with Daramu on the Hawash river. *Vide ibid.*, pp. 84-5.

18. *ibid.*, p. 191.

19. Arab-Faqih, p. 235.

20. *Nagade*, a trader, in Amharic.

21. Alvarez, pp. 110-11.

were going to the market at Arkiko. They were told this was an unusually small number as many people had not joined the caravan for fear of a shortage of water on the journey.²²

Throughout the period under discussion the Massawa route remained the favoured way of reaching the sea for the Ethiopian Empire's traders, though some informants, such as Brother Raphael in the early sixteenth century, considered the Suakin route easier, probably for political reasons. He states that the Portuguese used the port to unload spices from Aden.²³

The Turkish occupation of Massawa in 1557 undoubtedly introduced new hazards and uncertainties for traders using that route. Foreign control of the port was accompanied by extortionate dues and many arbitrary impositions. Ludolphus in the seventeenth century states that Mikael, 'the Habessinian Embassadour to the Emperour of the Turks', claimed that it was possible to reach Suakin from the Emperor's camp at Guenda within about a fortnight. The learned Saxon thought both the Massawa and the Suakin routes the 'safest and the shortest Cut' to Ethiopia provided 'you could agree with the Turks'.²⁴ However trade was by no means completely interrupted. Massawa was visited in this period by English and Dutch vessels,²⁵ and a number of Coptic dignitaries appear to have succeeded in entering Ethiopia after disembarking there. According to Ludolphus traders coming from Mocha continued to find it convenient to cross to Massawa and Arkiko from whence the passage inland was easy.²⁶

The establishment of Gondar, as we have seen, was an event of considerable commercial significance as the new capital was a more important market for both local and imported goods than any of the moving capitals. Emfras on Lake Tana also grew in importance at this time. Poncet states that it dealt extensively in slaves and civet, while Bruce says that its traders, who were all Muslim, travelled to the Somali areas for myrrh and frankincense, to the Dankali country for rock salt, and to the Galla regions beyond the Blue Nile where they sold blue Surat cloth and other goods. As this cloth often arrived in a soiled condition

22. *ibid.*, p. 361.

23. *Ethiopian Itineraries*, p. 145.

24. Ludolphus, *A New History of Ethiopia*, pp. 395-6.

25. Flemming, p. 89.

26. Ludolphus, pp. 395-6.

they would clean it and then stiffen it with gum which enabled them to sell it as new.²⁷

Another northern trade route, which led to the Dankali port of Beilul, was never of much significance. The Yamani ambassador Hasan bin Ahmad, who landed there in 1648, relates that he met a 'crowd of Abyssinian merchants' and a caravan thirty strong. The local ruler was on friendly terms with the Emperor, but the road inland was dangerous. It passed over desert wastes where there were frequent quarrels over the few available water holes. These could not be found without experienced and reliable guides who were difficult to procure. Several travellers had been murdered by their servants on the way. There was considerable fear of attacks by nomadic tribesmen and even greater fear of the Gallas.²⁸

During the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, when the emperor's camp was still situated in Shoa or its vicinity, the trade routes to the ports of Zeila and Berbera in the Gulf of Aden were of considerable importance. The Red Sea ports of Massawa and Suakin were then relatively far from the empire's centre of gravity and the journey involved passing through difficult country. Brother Zorzi, who left Ethiopia in 1514, told Zorzi that he had taken no fewer than 287 days to travel from Barara to Suakin.²⁹ He was, however, undoubtedly a slow traveller and tarried long on the way. Brother Raphael made the same journey in just over 100 days,³⁰ while Brother Thomas, the Franciscan, claims to have reached Massawa in 41 days and Suakin 15 days later.³¹ The long time needed by the traveller on these northern routes naturally increased the value of the eastern routes to Berbera, and Zeila (which had been temporarily occupied by the Emperor in 1415). Both these routes are described by the Ethiopian friars. Brother Thomas declared that the journey from Bali to Adal, which was undertaken by camel, took about 60 days; he added that during a good proportion of the journey the traveller was fortunate enough to be crossing good grazing lands.³² Corsali suggests that though there was continual war in his day between Zeila and the Christians of the interior, merchants were allowed to come and go without hindrance.³³ This appears to have been

27. Poncet, pp. 136-7; Bruce, Vol. V, pp. 28, 31.

28. Peiser, pp. 13-15.

29. *Ethiopian Itineraries*, pp. 133-7.

30. *ibid.*, pp. 139-47.

31. *ibid.*, pp. 149-55.

32. *ibid.*, p. 163.

33. *Historiale description*, p. 33.

the established rule, for as early as 1507 Affonso d'Albuquerque had been informed by a 'Moor' at Guardafui that the caravan from Zeila was 'always secure' because it 'enjoyed a safeguard' from both the Christian and Muslim authorities.³⁴

Brother Antonio of Urvuar (Warwar or Roha, better known as Lalibela) says that Zeila, was an 'excellent port'. He claims that Moorish fleets from Cambay in India brought there 'much merchandise', including spices and cloth of gold and silk, which was carried thence for twenty-five days through the province of Adal to the town of Genasere. Like Zeila itself, this belonged to the ruler of Adal and must have played a commercial role similar to that of Harar in later times. From Genasere the merchandise travelled a further forty days through cultivated land before reaching the 'great mercantile city' of Gendevelu (Gendebelu), which, according to Crawford, was probably about thirty miles to the east of latter-day Ankober, somewhere near Aliu Amba, the principal nineteenth-century market of Shoa. This city, he said, belonged to the Prester and was the place where the camels unloaded their merchandise which included spices from Cambay of all kinds except ginger which was found locally; these spices and other goods from India were obtained by barter or purchase, the currency employed being Hungarian and Venetian ducats and the silver coins of the Moors.³⁵ Arab-Faqih, who refers to the place as Gendebelo, confirms that it was an important trade centre; he adds that the population, which was Muslim, had hitherto paid taxes to the Emperor, and that his master, Ahmad Grañ, on occupying the town had killed the Christian merchants and seized the Emperor's treasure.³⁶

The Dominican Brother Thomas, who came from Shoa, and therefore may have been informed about this stretch of country, also underlined the importance of this route, observing that Berbera, too, had a good harbour and was 'the emporium of India and the gateway for all the spices and cloth and other things that come from that land to Barara'.³⁷

The intensification of religious antagonism caused by the wars of Grañ and the rolling back of the Ethiopian empire under Galla pressure in the sixteenth century subsequently destroyed

34. Birch, Vol. I, p. 202.

35. *Ethiopian Itineraries*, pp. 173-5.

36. Arab-Faqih, p. 65.

37. *Ethiopian Itineraries*, pp. 191, 185.

much of the value of these ports in the Gulf of Aden. Ludolphus, for example, observed that in his day Zeila was too remote from Ethiopia to be of any use and was, moreover, 'altogether unsafe, because of the deadly hatred between them (the people of Adal) and the Habessinians; as two of the Fathers of the Society (Jesuits) found true. For mistaking this Port, for that of Baylur, they paid for their mistake with the loss of their heads'.³⁸

According to the Dominican Brother Thomas the land of Prester John had also to a certain extent been supplied in his day through the ports of Kilwa³⁹ (Mogadishu?) and Malindi whence a caravan had travelled every year to Barara. 'Much merchandise' from Cambay, as well as goods carried on Portuguese vessels, was brought along this route, he said, despite the intervening 'wild places' and the various wild animals and 'bestial herdsmen' who inhabited the intervening forests, scrublands and deserts.⁴⁰ This trade, it should be noted, was in no sense comparable to that of the other routes.

The advance of the Gallas also endangered this southern trade route though commerce seems to have continued to trickle into Ethiopia by it for generations to come. Bermudes remarks of the period from 1541 to 1543 that the inhabitants of Gurage said 'white men' came there to trade from the south, but knew not their nationality, whether they were Portuguese, Turks, or others.⁴¹ Half a century later, however, King Felipe II of Spain and Portugal recognized in a letter of March 1594, that the Gallas had by then more or less effectively closed the Brava route,⁴² though Almeida subsequently noted that 'men with experience of the Indian Ocean coast said one could still enter Ethiopia from that direction'; the Moors of the coast reported that they still traded with Christian Abyssinians.⁴³

Communications with the south, however, were at the best very tenuous. Father Lobo relates that on reaching Jubo (Juba?) from Paté on the coast near Zanzibar he was informed by the local Galla *Luba* (Chief) that there were 'no fewer than Nine Nations between us and Abyssinia', who were 'always embroil'd amongst themselves or at war with the Abyssins, and enjoy'd no

38. Ludolphus, pp. 395-6.

39. Crawford is of opinion that Zorzi has confused Kilwa with some other East African port, probably Mogadishu. *Ethiopian Itineraries*, p. 101.

40. *Ethiopian Itineraries*, p. 193.

42. Beccari, Vol. X, p. 382.

41. Whiteway, p. 232.

43. Almeida, p. 19. *Vide* also Beccari, Vol. XII, p. 79.

Security even in their own Territories'.⁴⁴ Ludolphus also took the view that the southern ports of Mogodosh (Mogadishu) and Melindi were 'too far distant from the Habessines' to be of much economic value. 'The whole Region', he said, 'is Inhabited with none but wild and savage People, whose petty Princes are in continual wars one with another, and exercise their Fury against all Strangers as Spies, nor are there any Guides to be found'.⁴⁵

The gradual ending of Galla expansion made it possible partially to restore trading contacts with lands to the south of the empire. Though Bruce himself never travelled south of Tigre and Gojam he states that 'by courage, patience and attention' the Muslim traders, and in particular those from the provinces of Dreedda and Karoota, had discovered means of trading with the Galla lands as well as with Enarea and Kaffa 'in a tolerable degree of safety'. They carried south, he says, various imported goods such as coarse Surat blue cloths (called *marowti*), *kohl*, myrrh, beads and large needles, as well as coarse cloth from Begemder and rock salt from the plains near the Dankali region. The traders were generally away for nearly a year, after which they returned with slaves, civet, wax, hides, cardomum in large, beautiful pods, and a great quantity of ginger from a region south of Enarea. This commerce, however, seemed to him 'a poor trade' considering the loss of time it involved and the many accidents, extortions and robberies encountered on the way.⁴⁶

These southern provinces in turn also enjoyed trading connections with areas to the west and south. Bruce mentions, for example, a caravan travelling between Enarea and Atbara,⁴⁷ and said that the people of Enarea still conducted 'a small trade with Melinda (Melindi) on the Indian Ocean and with Angola(?) on the western, by means of intermediate nations'. Though gold was used as the medium of exchange within the country itself, coarse cotton cloths, *kohl*, beads and incense served as articles of trade with Angola and the 'Kingdoms of the Atlantic'.⁴⁸ In connection with this statement he elsewhere recalls that in the fifteenth century the Portuguese were told by the 'blacks' of Benin (in modern Nigeria) that they had intercourse with a Christian state

44. Lobo, p. 13.

45. Ludolphus, p. 396.

46. Bruce, Vol. II, pp. 222-3; Vol. III, pp. 253, 385. *Vide* also 3rd ed., Vol. VII, p. 93.

47. *ibid.*, 1st ed., Vol. IV, p. 394.

48. *ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 312-4.

far inland from the west coast.⁴⁹ Pero Pais also hints at the possible existence of such trade when he records that salt was said to be exported to a region which was designated, doubtless without much precision, as Monomotapa and Congo. He was, however, critical of this report, arguing that these regions were too far away and the means of communication too difficult to allow of trade and the Ethiopians did not even know the names of these places.⁵⁰ Little is known, however, about this route and it may be assumed that it was of small significance.

Far more important was the western trade route which linked Ethiopia with Sennar, Nubia and Egypt. Bruce relates that as early as the fourteenth century there was a 'constant trade carried on between Cairo and Abyssinia' by this route, and that the Emperor Newaya Kristos (1344-1372), intent on punishing the Egyptians for imprisoning the Coptic Patriarch Mark, on one occasion 'seized all the merchants from Cairo, and sent horse to interrupt and terrify the caravans'.⁵¹ A century and a half later, in 1507, Albuquerque was told that it was possible to reach Portugal from Prester John's dominions by way of Timbuctoo,⁵² while the Dominican Brother Thomas told Zorzi that there was a route which led westwards from Ethiopia to the province of Kuara and thence to Sennar and on to Tunis, presumably, by way of Cairo.⁵³ Alvares also mentions the existence of this route,⁵⁴ though Tome Pires considered it of little importance.⁵⁵

A century later, by which time the capital had moved to the north-west thus increasing the importance of this route, Almeida mentions the arrival of caravan loads of goods from the kingdom of Dequin (Kassala) and Egypt,⁵⁶ while Ludolphus describes the journey in some detail explaining that Cairo merchants were accustomed to sail up the Nile as far as Monfallot and thence travel overland via Dongola to the Ethiopian Empire which they entered at Chelga. The journey by land normally took as much as three months to Sennar and a further fourteen days from there to the confines of Ethiopia, as the merchants traded on the

49. *ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 105, 312, 314, 317; Vol. IV, pp. 97-8.

50. Beccari, Vol. II, p. 252

51. Bruce, Vol. II, p. 61.

52. Birch, Vol. I, pp. 202-3.

53. *Ethiopian Itineraries*, p. 187.

54. Alvarez, p. 153.

55. Pires, p. 17.

56. Almeida, p. 43.

way; it could be accomplished, however, in far less time 'without stop or lett'. Hitherto, when the intervening country was under 'stricter government', this route was 'safe enough and more frequented', but in his time the journey had become 'most troublesome'; he added that it was 'difficult and subject to many dangers', among them 'the Extortions of the Turks', the 'Robberies committed by several vagabond Nations, and the 'unwholesomeness of the climate'. Several troops of merchants were nevertheless venturesome enough to travel to Ethiopia by way of the west in his day.⁵⁷

Interest in this route appears to have increased in the seventeenth century. Though the Massawa route probably continued to predominate, the Turkish occupation of the coast had created many difficulties there, whereas the Fung rule in the Sudan had once again brought about law and order in the west. Moreover the establishment of Gondar in north-western Ethiopia naturally increased the importance of the Sennar route.

Budge is undoubtedly correct in asserting that at this time 'trade between Abyssinia and Europe developed greatly' and that Iyasu I (1682-1706) 'did much business in Cairo by means of caravans which travelled at regular intervals between the two countries'.⁵⁸

Opinions as to the convenience of this route varied considerably. A Jesuit priest, Jean Verzeau, reporting from Cairo in 1697, drew an uninviting picture. He stated that the Sennar route was rendered very unpleasant by reason of difficult mountains and scorching deserts, though there was some alleviation of the latter as a result of the rains. Two caravans left Cairo every year for Sennar, which could be reached with tolerable security, though travellers often suffered much on the way from shortage of water and other provisions. The Sennar region, however, was often disturbed on account of fighting and slave raiding, particularly on the Ethiopian frontier, which was consequently strongly guarded. Strangers, moreover, were liable to be carefully examined from head to foot - which was not difficult, he claims, with obvious exaggeration, because they would be almost naked on account of the heat; particular attention would then be paid to whether they were circumcised, a precaution arising

57. Ludolphus, pp. 394-5.

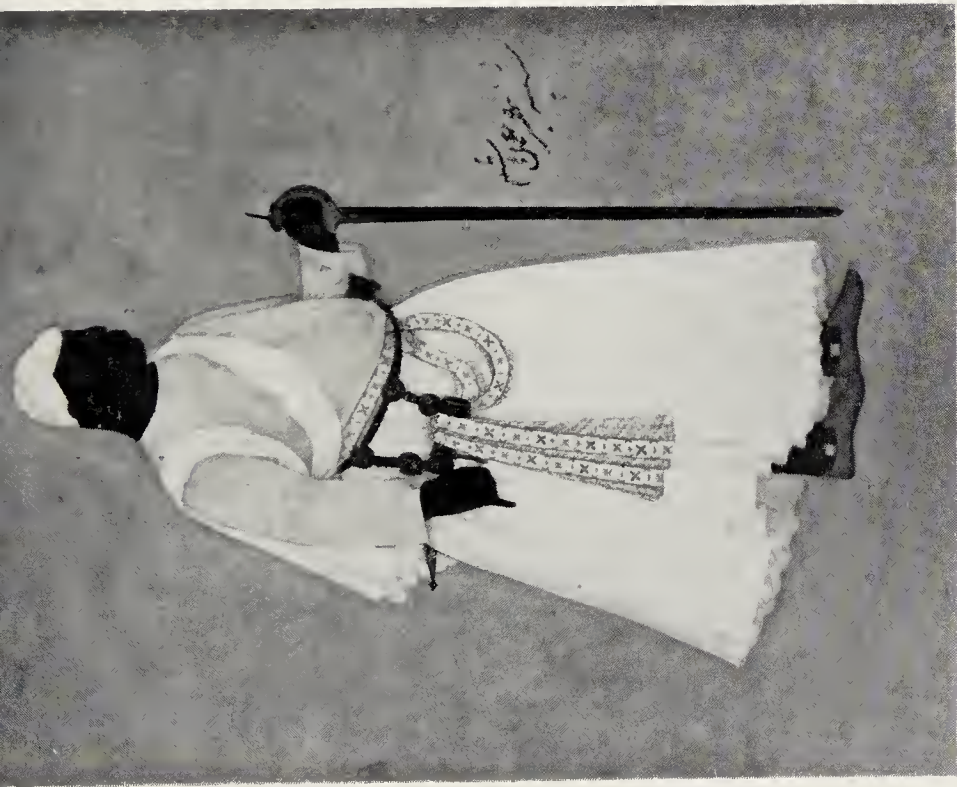
58. Budge, Vol. II, p. 421.

from the general hatred of Roman Catholics and fear of foreign spies.⁵⁹

De Maillet, the French Consul in Alexandria, was on the other hand firmly convinced that this route was more convenient, as well as somewhat shorter, than that of Massawa. In a report of 24 September 1701 he argued that boats sailing by sea from Egypt found the wind favourable only around March, and were obliged to call on the way at Jeddah, as the larger vessels did not stop at Massawa. At that port the local Pasha could be expected to demand extortionate taxes and might also create all sorts of obstacles; it would be necessary, moreover, to wait in very great heat for three or four months for the Emperor's permission to enter his dominions. If no reply was received, the traveller was obliged to return by trade winds in September or wait for the next monsoon in the following year. The caravan journey from Massawa to Gondar took three months and passed through some of the worst and most dangerous parts of the country; persons obliged to travel in the rainy season, which lasted for almost four months, were exposed to endless inconveniences, as well as many dangerous illnesses.

The overland route, he argued, had no such dangers. Caravans left Cairo for Dongola twice a year, in November and February, though it was possible to travel at any time. A four or five days' journey up the Nile brought one to Asyut in Upper Egypt, and a further sixteen days by caravan took one to Mushu, the first place in Nubia; five or six days more were required to reach Dongola; while twenty-five days sufficed for the journey from Sennar to Gondar. Ample supplies of food and water were obtainable all along the route. There were none of the risks and inconveniences of a long sea voyage, nor the terrible heat of Arabia or Massawa. No customs had to be paid in crossing from Egypt to Ethiopia, and the tax on entering Egypt at Alexandria was no more than 3 per cent and even this did not always have to be paid. The land route had the additional advantage that it was not considered suspect by the Ethiopians who, he said, would raise less difficulty for twenty Frenchmen coming that way than four arriving by Massawa. The traveller could be assured *en route* of a good reception from the King of Sennar; this acted as a spur to the Emperor of Ethiopia who, fearing that his neigh-

59. Beccari, Vol. XIV, pp. 10-12.



The Hapshi commander, Malik Ambar, who was influential in the Deccan, India, 1600–1626. (From a Mughul painting by Mir Hashim of the School of Jahangir, *circa* 1620. Victoria and Albert Museum 55.362.)



Ibrahim, the great-grandfather of Alexander Pushkin. (From an oil painting by an unknown Russian artist. Pushkin House Museum, Leningrad.)



An Ethiopian zebra brought to India in 1620. (From a drawing by the Indian artist, Ustad Mansur, dated 1620, bearing the inscription 'A zebra which the Turks with Mir Jafar brought from Abyssinia in the year 1030 (A.H.)'. Victoria and Albert Museum 55,366.)

bour might benefit at his expense, made sure that the foreigners did not remain in Nubia and had in consequence ordered his trade agent, Haji Ali, not to leave a single Frank there.⁶⁰

Poncet, who was the first reporter to tread this route which had been known by our earlier authorities only at second hand, has left a vivid description of it. He records that at Guerri on the White Nile the governor showed particular civility towards him 'in favour of the throne of Aethiopia'. Describing his subsequent crossing of the Nile, the Frenchman states that the method adopted was 'somewhat singular'. Men and goods were piled into a boat to which their beasts were attached by cords; the animals were then forced to swim across, the cords being pulled to steer the craft along. The unfortunate creatures suffered much in the passage, and many of them died, for though the Nile was not broad at that place it was both rapid and deep.⁶¹ On arriving at Sennar he found that it was ruled by a king who 'seem'd to bear a great affection and respect to the Emperour of Aethiopia'.⁶² Ethiopia's prestige in this area was also emphasized by Poncet's travelling companion Father De Brevedent. In a letter of 15 February 1699, he states that the Mek, or chief, of Dongola stood in fear and respect of the Ethiopian throne and had for this reason given Poncet every assistance in passing through his country though he was himself at that time in urgent need of a doctor. The ruler of Guerri displayed a similar attitude of respect.⁶³

On leaving Sennar Poncet and his party crossed the Blue Nile 'in a great trunk of a tree made hollow like a boat' and then journeyed by camel as far as the village of Giesim which was 'mid-way' between the city of Sennar and the confines of Ethiopia. They were obliged to leave the camels behind there 'by reason of the mountains that are to be crossed and the herbs which poison animals'. Camels were therefore hired only on condition that they were not made use of beyond Girana, an Ethiopian village seven days' journey away where 'folks resort to buy them'. Mules and horses were purchased at Giesim, however, as they could normally not be obtained on the Ethiopian side of the frontier. At this last-mentioned place Poncet saw a caravan

60. *ibid.*, Vol. XIV, pp. 181-2.

61. Poncet, p. 101.

62. *ibid.*, p. 103.

63. Beccari, Vol. XIV, pp. 62, 64-6.

of *jabartis*, Muslim traders operating in this region, who were subject to the Emperor of Ethiopia and were considered as his slaves.⁶⁴

The Ethiopian frontier post was reached at Serke, a 'pretty town' of five hundred or six hundred bamboo houses some ten miles on the Sudanese side of the present border. A further day's journey brought the travellers to Tambisso, a large village belonging to the Ethiopian patriarch,⁶⁵ and six days' later they reached Girana where they were greeted and fed by the lords of the place who introduced them to an escort which had been provided for them by the Emperor.⁶⁶

A further couple of days' journey brought the party to Chelga (about twenty-five miles south-west of Gondar) 'a great and fair town, beset on all sides by aloes'. Poncet described it as 'a place of great commerce', and adds: 'they hold a market there every day, where the inhabitants of the neighbourhood come to vend civet, gold and all sorts of cattle and provisions.'⁶⁷ After a day's march to the 'neat little village' of Barko, they were a mere half day from Gondar. The whole journey from Sennar to the Ethiopian capital had thus in fact taken seventy-one days instead of the twenty-five mentioned by de Maillet.

The Sennar route, however, was not without its difficulties. On 20 October 1700, the Jesuit Jean Verzeau wrote from Port Said that the Ethiopians were at war with Sennar as the result of the assassination of one of their nationals in that country and that the western route was therefore totally closed to trade.⁶⁸ A few months later, on 5 January 1701, de Maillet reported from Cairo that because of the friction between the two rulers no Ethiopian had been able to reach Egypt in the previous year.⁶⁹ In a subsequent (undated) letter of the same year he reiterated that the trade between the two countries was still 'totally interrupted'.⁷⁰ Three years later, a French ambassador, M. Lenoir du Roule, left Cairo for Gondar, and, following Poncet's footsteps reached Sennar in May 1705; he was detained there for six months and then murdered, his companion the younger Murad being also kept in custody. The Emperor Takla Haymanot (1706-1708), believing the Pasha of Cairo responsible, wrote a

64. Poncet, p. 110.

65. *ibid.*, pp. 111-12.

66. *ibid.*, p. 113.

67. *ibid.*, p. 113.

68. Beccari, Vol. XIV, p. 101.

69. *ibid.*, Vol. XIV, p. 129.

70. *ibid.*, Vol. XIV, p. 202.

strong protest to him, complaining of this violation of 'the law of nations', and reminding him of Ethiopia's supposed power to control the flow of the Nile. 'For the present', he wrote, 'we can demand of and exhort you to desist from any future vexations towards our envoys, and not to disturb us by detaining those who shall be sent towards you, but you shall let them pass and continue their route without delay, coming and going wherever they will freely for their own advantage, whether they are our subjects or Frenchmen, and whatsoever you shall do to or for them, we shall regard as done to or for ourselves.'⁷¹

Bruce, who decided to take the western route on his return from Ethiopia in troubled times half a century or so later, reveals that the Massawa route though 'more tedious' was then more secure. Observing that the Sennar route was not considered practical, he states that its commerce had declined considerably since former days. He relates that the village of Cherkin, which lay on this route, held a market every Saturday at which cotton, cattle, honey and 'coarse cotton cloths' were sold.⁷²

71. Bruce, Vol. II, pp. 526-7.

72. Bruce, Vol. IV, pp. 89, 250, 311.

Chapter 27

Ethiopia's Access to the Sea

THE ETHIOPIAN Empire's changing political fortune on the coast is graphically revealed by sixteenth- and seventeenth-century records. Alvares relates that on landing at the island port of Massawa in 1520 he and his compatriots were welcomed by two emissaries from the mainland town of Arkiko, one a Christian and the other a Moor (Muslim). They told him that this town and the mainland in general belonged to Christians who were governed by the Bahrnagash, a subject of Prester John, and that whenever the Turks came Christians and Moors fled together to the mountains, taking with them such of their property as they could carry. This statement would seem to indicate that the warlike Turks were dreaded by their Muslim co-religionists as much as by the Christian population.¹ The Bahrnagash, or ruler of the sea province, it should be recalled, was at that time one of the most important officers of the Ethiopian realm, as can be seen from the fact that the noble who held that post was a brother of the Emperor mother² and paid his sovereign an annual tribute of a hundred and fifty horses, as well as very many silks and other cloth from India collected as customs.³

The author of the *Carta das novas* who arrived a year after Alvares in a Portuguese man-of-war relates that on reaching Massawa he saw 'a large number of boats', including two Gujerati ships at anchor; one of these set sail, but was pursued and destroyed by the Portuguese fleet which was engaged in eliminating the trade of the Muslims and their allies; the other boats succeeded in escaping and made either for Suakin to the north, or for the nearby ports of Arkiko and Decamim a little to the south, both of which belonged to Prester John. Most of the Moors of Massawa also fled and placed themselves under the protection of the Ethiopian governor of Arkiko.⁴

Like Alvares the author of the *Carta* was waited upon at

1. Alvarez, p. 3.

2. *ibid.*, p. 59.

3. *ibid.*, p. 324.

4. *The Discovery of Abyssinia*, p. 67.

Massawa by a deputation from Arkiko composed this time of two Christians and a Muslim. Their attitude towards Christians from overseas is shown by the *Carta's* account of the reception they gave to the Portuguese: 'They kissed their feet, and kept saying nothing but "Christian, Christian, Jesus Christ, Son of Mary".' They then presented the visiting captain with a letter from their governor expressing great thanks to God for the fulfilment of the prophecies that Christians would come to Massawa, and declared their advent had long been desired. The Portuguese captain thereupon wrote to the Ethiopian governor of Arkiko to inform him that he had orders to attack the Moors in the Red Sea, and to make contact with the ruler of Arkiko, and to subject Massawa and Dahlak to Ethiopian rule. It is related that when the delegation returned to the mainland in one of the Portuguese boats 'two thousand souls came down to the water's edge, and with great delight rushed into the sea, trying to drag the brigantine ashore. Those who were bringing the message landed; all the other people ranged themselves in procession with the flag (bearing the cross of Christ, a Portuguese gift) before them. With much pleasure and rejoicing they fixed it above the dwelling of the Captain (i.e. governor) of Harkiko (Arkiko)'.⁵

In subsequent talks with the Bahrnagash the Portuguese captain assured him of his country's friendship, declaring that the kings of Portugal had 'always made war against the Moors', and had taken their lands from them in many parts of Africa. The King his master, he said, was fully aware that Prester John was 'a most Christian King' and had sent his captains to ascertain whether he possessed any ports, as well as to make war against the Moors, 'the enemies of our holy faith'. He himself had orders to remove them from the islands of Dahlak and Massawa, and to hand over these ports to the Prester and his captains. The only reason why they had not already built a fortress at the last-mentioned port was that the ship bringing the necessary materials had been lost on the way.⁶

The Bahrnagash replied enthusiastically that his master desired nothing more than to clear the Moors from the land; if the Portuguese needed men or supplies he would do his utmost to be of service. As for the proposed fortress it could be built wherever they wished, for everything was at the disposal of their king.⁷

5. *ibid.*, p. 69.

6. *ibid.*, pp. 83-4.

7. *ibid.*, p. 85.

The question of Portuguese intervention was also discussed by the Emperor Lebna Dengel (1508-1540) in his talks with the Portuguese mission of 1520-6. Observing its scanty equipment he was at first doubtful of the assistance which Portugal could or would render. This feeling was increased when the emissaries showed him a map of the world and he saw how small Portugal appeared on it; on one occasion, Alvares relates, he 'sent to say that the King of Portugal and the King of Castile were sovereigns of few lands, and that the King of Portugal would not be strong enough to defend the Red Sea from the power of the Turks and Roumys; and that it would be well if he were to write to the King of Spain that he should order a fortress to be built in Zeila and the King of Portugal should order one to be built in Masua (Massawa), and the King of France order one to be made in Suaquem (Suakin), and all three, with the forces of the Prester, would be able to guard the Red Sea and take Jiddah (Jeddah) and Mekkah (Mecca) and Cairo, and the holy house (Jerusalem), and go through all the countries they chose'.⁸

The Portuguese boastfully replied that their King, 'by means of his captains, was powerful enough to defend and guard the Red Sea against all the power of the great Sultan and of the great Turk, and to make war upon them even to the holy house; and that he had made greater conquests in Africa against the King of Fez and Morocco, and many other Kings, subjugating all the Indies and making all their Kings his tributary subjects'.

Only half convinced, the Emperor agreed that the Portuguese alone should collaborate with him. He wrote to King João III of Portugal proposing joint operations against the Turks. 'I do not wish for ambassadors from the Kings of Egypt,' he declared, 'nor from other Kings who used to send them, but only from Your Highness, which I much desire, because the Moorish Kings do not hold me as a friend on account of the faith, but only on account of the trade and merchandise, from which much profit accrues to them, and they take away from my Kingdoms much gold, of which they are great friends and of me little; and their pleasures do not rejoice me, only I trade with them because it was the custom of my predecessors.'⁹

At the suggestion of the embassy Lebna Dengel therefore proposed that the Portuguese should establish themselves at

8. Alvarez, p. 311.

9. *ibid.*, p. 398.

Suakin, Massawa and Zeila. He wrote to Diego Lopes de Sequeira, the Portuguese Captain-General of the Indies: 'I write to you for the sake of the embassy which you sent, which says you wish to build a church and a fort in the island of Masua, and you ask me leave to do it: I give you permission to make a church and a castle in Masua and in Dalaqua (Dahlak), and to put priests in the churches, and strong men to guard the castles from fear of the Moors. . . . Do this quickly before you go to India and do not give yourselves leisure in this, nor go to India until you have made a church and a castle. . . . And make a market where they buy and sell merchandise, and do not allow Moors to buy and sell, but Christians. And if you wish that Moors buy and sell there, let it be as you please and with your license. And after you have done this in Masua, come to Zeila and make a church and castle.'¹⁰

Zorzi's Ethiopian informants also spoke of the situation in this part of the coast. Most of them were familiar with Suakin, which both they and the Italian traveller Andrea Corsali describe as the chief place of embarkation for Ethiopian pilgrims *en route* for Jerusalem and Rome.¹¹ Already in 1510 the Portuguese admiral Albuquerque had learnt that a caravan left every year by that port bound for Mount Sinai and Jerusalem. They were always accompanied, he was told, by a captain with cavalrymen because of possible interference by the Arabs, and took with them many camel-loads of victuals as no supplies could be obtained in the desert. On reaching the port they purchased spices from India and embarked on small craft called *jalbas* which took them to Koseir, farther north along the African side of the Red Sea; thence they travelled inland for three days to Keneh on the Nile where they embarked on barges which sailed down the river, enabling them to reach Cairo a few days later.¹² Bruce confirms that until the Ottoman Emperor Selim the Great's conquest of Egypt and Arabia (*circa* 1516), Suakin was frequented by many pilgrims who assembled in the rich province of Hamasien, and arrived sometimes one thousand strong. Fifteen hundred of them led by a monk called Abba Asrata Kristos left in 1517, but on their return were intercepted by Selim's troops who killed many

10. *ibid.*, p. 204.

11. *Historiale Description*, p. 16; *Ethiopian Itineraries*, pp. 137, 155 *et passim*. *Vide* also Alvarez, p. 352.

12. Birch, Vol. II, pp. 229-30.

of them and obliged the rest to seek refuge in the desert where they perished of hunger and thirst. A caravan of over three hundred friars and priests and fifteen nuns nevertheless attempted the journey in 1525, but on leaving Hamasien for the coast were attacked by the Moors and surrounded; the old men were put to the sword and the young sold as slaves, only fifteen returning to tell the tale.¹³

Brother Thomas, who came from Angot, observed to Zorzi in 1523 that the Bahrnagash ruled the coastal strip as far as – but not including – Suakin in the north and the ‘Arabia Sea’, presumably the Gulf of Aden, in the south. With his capital at Debaroa (Debarwa) he was ‘king’ or ‘lord’ of Bizen, Embanderon (Amba Derho), Massawa, Agda (the coastal village of Edd subsequently bought by the French in the early nineteenth century), Alal (Alalea), Maria(?), Bagala (Bakla), Dagore, and Cia (Tokar).

The northern portion of the province of the Bahrnagash between Massawa and Suakin, consisted, according to Brother Thomas, of barren lands where only shepherds dwelled; passing travellers feared for their lives as various wild animals lurked in these regions, while Nubia to the west was full of ‘bad people, robbers and murderers’. For this reason he advised persons wishing to visit his homeland not to attempt the overland route, but to travel instead to Lisbon and there take ship for Massawa by way of the Cape of Good Hope and Cape Guardafui.¹⁴

Suakin, he emphasized, was controlled by a Moor subject to the Turks who had furnished it with artillery with the result that the Portuguese could not attack it successfully. Massawa, on the other hand, belonged to the Prester who had consigned it to the King of Portugal so as to make the journey safe for caravans.¹⁵

Grañ’s invasion considerably weakened the empire’s position on the coast. João de Castro, for example, who visited Massawa in 1541, reported that the island, which had previously been under the sovereignty of Prester John, had been usurped by the King of Dahlak.¹⁶ The usurper’s power was broken, however, by the Portuguese who temporarily occupied the port of Massawa to assure their lines of communication with Christovão da Gama’s army of intervention.

13. Bruce, Vol. II, pp. 158–9.

14. *Ethiopian Itineraries*, p. 181. *Vide* also Alvarez, pp. 64, 345, 352.

15. *Ethiopian Itineraries*, pp. 155, 159, 175–7.

16. Kammerer, *Le Routier de Dom Joam de Castro*, p. 69.

A decade or so later the Turks, who had been steadily strengthening their hold on the Red Sea area, launched an offensive of crucial importance. Pasha Ozdemur crossed the Red Sea with three thousand men assembled at Jeddah; in 1557 he proceeded to seize first the island port of Massawa, and then the mainland port of Arkiko, where he built two small forts and brought in a garrison of four hundred men. He then moved up on to the nearby plateau and advanced to Debra Damo where his forces massacred the monks. The chronicler of Galawdewos (1540–1559) states that this Emperor was much disturbed by the penetration inland of the children of Japhet (i.e. Levantines or Turks). It was fiercely resisted by the Ethiopian *felahin*¹⁷ or peasantry, whose property was ruthlessly plundered by the invader.¹⁸ The Turkish commander proceeded to build a strong tower at Debaroa with a long wall, and 'heaped up within it vases of gold and silver, jewels, brocades and precious stuffs from Stambul (Istanbul), Egypt, Zabid, Arabia and Abyssinia, and a vast quantity of miscellaneous objects of great value'.¹⁹ Almost immediately afterwards, however, he was defeated by Bahrnagash Yeshaq, the Ethiopian governor of the coastal province, who was greatly assisted by the local peasantry. Debaroa was recaptured, and the Turks, who lost all their treasures, were obliged to retreat to their impregnable coastal positions at Suakin, Massawa and Arkiko.²⁰

The victorious Yeshaq subsequently found himself at odds with the Ethiopian Emperor Minas (Wanag Sagad II 1559–1563) against whom he rebelled in 1560. Though at first he overcame the Emperor's forces he was later obliged to retreat and fled to Massawa, appealing for asylum and help to his former enemy, Ozdemur Pasha. He ceded to the Pasha Debaroa and all the country between it and Massawa; the Turks thus once again became masters of part of the plateau as well as lands nearer to the sea.²¹ Yeshaq endeavoured to form an alliance with the Emir of Harar, Sultan Mohamed IV, in 1572–3, but in 1578 the Emperor Sartsa Dengel (1563–1597) launched a decisive

17. The Arabic word is employed in the chronicle.

18. Conzelman, pp. 158–9, 164; Kammerer, *La Mer Rouge*, Vol. III, pp. 166–7.

19. Conzelman, p. 166.

20. Trimingham, p. 92.

21. Budge, Vol. II, p. 357; Bruce, Vol. II, pp. 210–11.

campaign in which the unfaithful Bahrnagash and the Pasha of Massawa were both killed. The Turks thereupon again retired to Arkiko whence the Emperor's attempts to dislodge them failed as their fortress resisted all assaults. Hostilities were therefore brought to an end and the invaders sent rich presents to the Emperor as a token of peace.²²

Bruce, writing over two centuries later, also emphasized the detrimental effects of the Turkish occupation. Massawa, he recalled, had once been a place of 'much resort' and 'one of the principal places of residence of the Bahrnagash' who had been, after the Emperor and the Bitwaded, 'the person of the greatest consideration in the Kingdom' and an official invested with the *nagarit* and *sandaq*, the kettle-drum and staff, marks of supreme command; his jurisdiction, Bruce states with some exaggeration, extended as far as the country round Cape Guardafui and southward towards Sofala on the Indian Ocean.²³

The status of the Bahrnagash, Bruce adds, was much diminished by Yeshaq's treachery. From then onwards the governor of the sea province was not allowed the *sandaq* and *nagarit*, and no longer had a place in Council unless especially called on by the Emperor. He preserved his privilege of being crowned with gold; but, when appointed, was said to have a cloak thrown over him which was white on one side and dark blue on the other; the officer who crowned him admonished him to preserve his allegiance to the Emperor, signified by the white side of the cloak, and warned him if he practised treason of the disgrace and punishment that would befall him and of the fate which had already attended his predecessor. This he indicated by turning up the cloak to show the dark colour of mourning.²⁴

With the gradual dwindling of Turkish power came the transfer, shortly after 1589, of Massawa and Arkiko to a local chief of the Beja family from the Samhar region who acted on behalf of the Ottoman Empire, and assumed the title of Naib (Deputy) of Arkiko.²⁵ According to Bruce, who made inquiries on the spot, it was specified by treaty at this time or somewhat later that the Ethiopian Emperor should receive 'half the revenue of the Massawa custom house in return for which the Naib was allowed

22. Trimingham, pp. 96, 98. Conti Rossini, *Historia Regis Sarsa Dengel*, pp. 63-93 *et passim*.

24. *ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 249-50.

23. Bruce, Vol. I, p. 483.

25. Trimingham, pp. 98, 104.

to occupy a small strip of barren dry country called Samhar inhabited by Shiho shepherds and stretching from Hamazen (Hamasiën) on the north to the foot of the Taranta mountain on the south'.²⁶ Payments, however, were soon suspended.

The writings of the Jesuits reveal that there was frequent trouble in their day between the rulers of Massawa and the Ethiopians of the mainland. Pero Pais relates that in 1615 supplies sent to him and his compatriots from India were seized by the Pasha of Massawa, ostensibly as a reprisal against the Ethiopians who had attacked a Turkish raiding party sent to steal cattle. The Ethiopians had killed one hundred and ten of the raiders and captured sixty-two rifles. The Pasha threatened to hold the property of the Portuguese until these weapons were returned, and wrote a letter to that effect which was shown to the Emperor Susneyos (1607-1632). The latter indignantly replied that the Turks by attempting to steal his cattle had themselves broken the peace and that he therefore owed them nothing; on the contrary unless they surrendered everything they had taken from the Portuguese he would not allow the merchants to bring victuals to the port. Pais, who notes that Massawa had no supplies of its own, states that the Emperor's viceroy in Tigre was given orders to close the trade route, but that he tarried for some time, which the Portuguese considered a great pity as the Turks stood in great fear of the Ethiopians and would doubtless have returned everything if pressed. Soon afterwards the Pasha left on a pilgrimage to Mecca but gave word that if supplies from the mainland were interrupted his officials should make peace by handing back the property they had seized. Before this order could be executed, however, news came that he had been replaced. His deputy thereupon left, taking with him all the goods in question except for a little church property.

On the arrival of the new Pasha's deputy Pais wrote another letter of complaint in which he warned that the Emperor would cut off supplies for the port unless full restitution was made. The deputy replied that he regretted the action taken by the former Pasha, but that he could not settle so grave a matter until the arrival of his chief. In the meantime, however, if the Emperor would allow the merchants to pass, he was prepared to make partial restitution to the Portuguese and would allow them to

26. Bruce, Vol. IV, pp. 250-1.

receive whatever arrived for them that year without levying any tax on it. At the same time he dispatched some books, pictures and other church articles, stating that these were all he could find. He also wrote to the Emperor in more or less the same terms, adding that since he had not taken the goods it was unreasonable for him to pay compensation.

Susneyos, however, was not impressed by such excuses. He replied that there would be no trade with the Turks until they returned what they had taken from the Portuguese. A number of courtiers, believed to have been promised money by the Moors, begged him to be more lenient, but he remained adamant and forbade the traders from taking victuals to the port on pain of death. Pais, writing on 22 June 1616, stated that no reply to this threat had yet been received; he was confident, however, that the Turks would soon give way; they would otherwise be starved since they were totally dependent on supplies from Ethiopian territory.²⁷

Notwithstanding or perhaps even because of this dependence on the mainland the Turks continued their incursions into the Ethiopian empire. Another Jesuit, Gaspar Pais, tells us that there was renewed skirmishing in 1625. On that occasion the Massawa army, which comprised many Turks as well as four hundred Arabs, embarked on a further raiding expedition and seized much booty before being attacked by the Ethiopians who were completely victorious. They annihilated the entire raiding party (except for its leader, who escaped on horseback), retrieved the stolen cattle, captured over a hundred arquebuses and numerous scimitars, and sacked the Turkish fort. At about the same time another Ethiopian force operating at the request of the Dankali ruler overcame a Turkish garrison and captured three bronze cannon and further munitions of war at the small port of Dafalo between Massawa and the Dankali lands. These victories convinced Susneyos of the possibility of imposing favourable terms on Massawa, a port which now seemed within his grasp though he had no desire of administering it at the time.²⁸

The result was that in the following year an agreement was reached with the assistance of the Jesuits who also benefited from it. The first four articles covered the following points:

Firstly, all goods belonging to the Emperor and landed at

27. Beccari, Vol. I, pp. 347-9.

28. *Lettere Annue di Ethiopia*, pp. 5-7.

Suakin or Massawa should be exempt from tribute or imposition whether they came from India or elsewhere.

Secondly, the Emperor should be allowed to send his agents, be they Moors or Arabs, through Massawa as far as India, such agents being free to leave and return with their belongings without loss or molestation.

Thirdly, all property, including clothes, of the (Catholic) Patriarch and leading priests should be exempt from taxation if it belonged to the Church and if of a personal nature should pay no duty beyond what was the rule at the time of Mahmoud Pasha, i.e. of tax of 25 per cent of its value.

Fourthly, the Jesuit fathers, as well as their servants and slaves, should have complete freedom to come and go from India as they wished.

The agreement further specified that its terms should be set down in the customs records of Massawa and Suakin and should be honoured by the Pasha, his officials and successors. It stated that the breaking of any article would be considered as a violation of the agreement as a whole, in which eventuality the Bahrnagash would at once close the trade routes and seize caravans bound for the port until he received new instructions from his master the Emperor.²⁹

Two years earlier, in 1624, according to Bruce, Susneyos had sent a zebra and 'several other curious articles to the Pasha of Suakin with a request to him not to continue the Turkish policy of obstructing the Portuguese from entering his empire.'³⁰

Though the treaty was soon violated the Emperor seemed in practice reluctant to reassert his position at the coast. Barradas states, for example, that one of the nobles of Serae, a good soldier with a numerous following, had advocated the seizure of Arkiko and Massawa, but that Susneyos had refused to give him permission. In conversations with the Portuguese he declared that if he wished to take Arkiko he could do so at once but doubted whether he could hold it in the face of the great power of the Turks. Barradas, however, wondered whether the Emperor's decision might not also have been motivated by a fear that the nobleman once safely established at the coast might throw off his allegiance of the central authority.

29. *ibid.*, p. 177-80. *Vide* also Beccari, Vol. XII, p. 147.

30. Bruce, Vol. II, p. 409.

The Naib had therefore been allowed greatly to damage Massawa's trade by his exactions and the Emperor had not even been able to obtain a share in its revenue though that of nearby Suakin was divided between the rulers of Suakin and those of the interior. A similar division, Barradas felt sure, might have been made in Massawa were it not that the Ethiopians always lacked the resources to carry out the necessary undertaking, and that the Emperor, badly served in his capital, was virtually not obeyed at all in the provinces.³¹

Turkish influence at Massawa, Arkiko and the neighbouring coast was far-reaching and marked a further stage in Ethiopia's growing isolation. Ludolphus, writing in the middle of the seventeenth century, observed that the Ethiopians in former times had 'frequently made their holy Pilgrimages to Jerusalem and so . . . to Rome when the Mamalucks were Lords of Egypt; their Government being more gentle and the ways then far less dangerous than afterwards. But the Covetousness of the Turks had quite altered the Case, for the Bashas and the Governors of the Islands of the Red Sea and upper Egypt, Men for the most part of base and sordid Condition, having bought their Employments at Court with Money, without any sense of Law or Equity, so torment and vex all sorts of Travellers and suck the Merchants Purses in such manner, though to the utter impoverishing the Subject and utter decay of Trade, have ruined all Commerce and Society with those Places: so that the Habessines now very rarely visit Jerusalem; and more rarely go to abide there, as they were wont. For though there, they are somewhat more free from the exactions of the Church, yet are they more oppressed by want, in regard that the Revenues settled by the Habessines Kings upon Pilgrims in those Parts are in the hands of the Turks, so that unless the Alms of the Place which are very sparing, God knows, support them, hunger presently destroys them'.³²

Difficulties at Massawa and Arkiko increased Ethiopian interest in the Dankali port of Beilul which Ludolphus refers to as Baylur. The Dankali King, he explained in the middle of the seventeenth century, was 'in Amity with the Habessines', but the journey inland, was 'tedious and very much infested by the Robberies of

31. Beccari, Vol. I, pp. 296-8.

32. Ludolphus, pp. 392-3.

the Gallans (Gallas), though they that could Travel with a good Band of Musqueteers need little fear them'.³³

Beilul, it may be added, is mentioned by Father Jerome Lobo who says that early in the sixteen twenties while he was in India he received a message from Ethiopia stating that the Emperor, unwilling to expose him to the hazards of passing through Turkish-occupied Massawa, thought that this port, which belonged to a prince dependent on him, was the 'Place of the greatest Security to Land at'. The Jesuit priest suggests, however, that though the port was used by the Emperor of Ethiopia as his lifeline with the outside world it was in fact little known to international trade. 'We were', he explains, 'entirely ignorant in what part of the Coast to find Baylur; it was so little known that our Pilots who had made many Voyages in this Sea could give us no Account of it.' Eventually they discovered the port and learnt on landing that the local ruler, the King of the Danakil, was 'Tributary to the Emperor of Abyssinia and very faithful to his Sovereign' – a statement confirmed at about the same time by Barradas. The party then marched inland, passing by way of the vast uninhabitable plains,³⁴ from which most of Ethiopia obtained its salt.

Little use was made of Beilul because of these difficulties of communication, and its existence was in consequence ignored by Almeida as well as by subsequent travellers. Writing of the year 1633, two or more generations after the Turkish occupation of Massawa and Arkiko in 1557, Almeida states that the Ethiopians were now left with the sole port of Defalo, which he describes as being ten or twelve leagues to the east. It was, however, by no means secure as it could easily be controlled by the Turks at Massawa, the more so as the inhabitants of the coastal lands between it and Massawa, almost all of whom were Moors, were subject to Turkish sway.³⁵ It was in fact reoccupied in 1633 or 1634, according to Barradas who states that the Turks then held a fort there with six or seven men replaced from Arkiko every eight to fifteen days.³⁶

33. Ludolphus, pp. 395–6; *vide* also Bruce, Vol. II, p. 82.

34. Lobo, pp. 25–6; Beccari, Vol. I, p. 298.

35. Almeida, p. 14.

36. Beccari, Vol. I, pp. 298–9.

The Ethiopian empire, it should be emphasized, never fully acquiesced in the Turkish occupation of Massawa. On 26 June 1604, for example, the Emperor Za Dengel (Atnaf Sagad II 1603-1604) wrote to King Felipe III of Spain asking that the Viceroy of Goa should attack the port and promising that he would instruct the Ethiopian governor of the coastal province to advance to the sea and reoccupy Arkiko in support of the operation. The Ethiopians, he emphasized, were in a strong position to do this as the Turks on the island were dependent on food and water from the mainland. 'We will not send honey, slaves or other supplies to Massawa,' he declared, 'till we have taken power from the Turks.'³⁷

Little came of this projected blockade though one was in fact carried out almost at the end of the century. It is mentioned in the chronicle of Iyasu I (1682-1706) which records that in 1693 Musa bin Umar, the Naib of Arkiko, tried to extort a much higher duty than usual; when Murad, the Emperor's trade agent, refused to pay the Turks seized goods destined for his master which were waiting at Massawa. Iyasu thereupon ordered the people of Hamasien to cease supplying the port with honey, butter, cheese and all other foodstuffs on pain of death, and threatened to march on the coast. A severe famine ensued at the port. Faced with these developments the Naib is said to have trembled with fear; he collected the confiscated goods and added to them a large quantity of rich carpets and other valuable presents, and went himself to the Emperor at Aksum where he was admonished and pardoned.³⁸ The Naib, as Poncet observed, 'stood in great fear' of the Emperor, 'for the Aethiopians cou'd easily make themselves masters of the place which formerly belonged to them by starving them or refusing to furnish them with water; the inhabitants of Messoua being oblig'd to fetch it from Arcouva (Arkiko) there being none on their island'.³⁹

Some few years later, in 1700, Murad's nephew of the same name was selected by Iyasu to accompany Poncet on his return to France by way of Massawa, but was thrown into prison on reaching Cairo. Trouble at the port was not infrequent. In 1745, a few years after the death of Abuna Krestodoulos, the Emperor

37. Pais, Vol. III, p. 43.

38. Guidi, *Annales Iohannis I, Iyasu I et Bakaffa*, pp. 151-2; Bruce, Vol. II, p. 456.

39. Poncet, p. 154.

Iyasu II (1730-1755) collected four hundred and fifty ounces of gold and requested three Muslim merchants and brokers who happened to be at his court, Hamid Ali, Abd-Allah and Abd al-Kadar, to go to Cairo with Tewodros (Theodore) a priest of Debra Salalo, Likianos of Azazo and an Egyptian called Giyorgis to bring back a new Abuna. However, on reaching Massawa they were put in chains by the Naib who insisted on being given half their money. When Iyasu heard this he ordered Ras Mikael Schul, the governor of Tigre, and Bahrnagash Solomon, to blockade the port. The Naib – whom the Ethiopian chronicle describes as a 'devil in human form' – thereupon threatened to put the captives to death, with the result that they speedily handed over the money and were allowed to depart in peace. Subsequently they were incarcerated at Jeddah in April 1746 by the sheriff of Mecca who demanded the rest of their money.

When the Abuna at last arrived at Massawa the following March he was detained by the Naib until his fees were paid. Iyasu refused to pay, but Janni, a Greek who lived at Adowa and acted as Ras Mikael's agent, succeeded in smuggling the Abuna through; Tewodros was left behind and was later cast into prison by the Naib till eighty ounces of gold were paid for his release. Iyasu was extremely angry at these events, and began to inquire into the cause of the Naib's frequent insolence; he knew, Bruce states, that not only the governor of Tigre, but even the Bahrnagash, could reduce Massawa 'to nothing with his little finger'. Yasu found out that a strong friendship existed between Mikael and the Naib and that it was for this reason that the latter had dared to act as he had done. Iyasu therefore raised an army, marched into Tigre and occupied Adowa, with the intention of attacking Massawa and punishing the Naib; he was prevented from accomplishing his purpose, however, by the news that the Azabo and Doba peoples were invading his frontiers. After defeating these invaders he returned to Gondar, and summoned Mikael to attend him there. The latter refused, fled to the mountain stronghold of Samayat in Tigre, and endeavoured without success to resist the Emperor's forces. After hard fighting he was obliged to surrender. He came down the mountain carrying a stone on his head as a sign of guilt and was promptly imprisoned. Soon afterwards he was pardoned and distinguished

himself as an able general. The Naib in the meantime had made the Emperor a peace offering.⁴⁰

On subsequently coming to power at Gondar Ras Mikael decided, according to Bruce, to adopt a stronger policy toward the Naib. He was said to have warned him that he would lay waste Arkiko and Massawa on his next campaign and reduce them to a desert like Samhar. Since the Ras was noted for keeping such promises many of the Massawa traders fled either to Arabia or the Ethiopian town of Debaroa. The Naib, however, had not openly shown any sign of fear and had refrained from paying any dues either to Ethiopia or to the Pasha of Jeddah; the latter had therefore threatened to arrest Massawa traders in Arabia and had written to Mikael appealing to him to put pressure on the joint enemy.⁴¹

Mikael, however, was too much concerned with other problems to devote his entire attention to the coast, though Bruce states that this prince's Greek trade adviser, Janni, had twice to dissuade him from going in person to sweep the Naib 'from the face of the earth'.⁴² The extortions of the Naib were not therefore curtailed. On 30 September 1789, we find the Roman Catholic missionary Michael Angelus da Tricarico reporting from Mocha that the Massawa customs were very 'dangerous', while Bruce, as we shall see, writes in similar vein.⁴³

Massawa and Arkiko, it should be emphasized, remained economically dependent on the Ethiopian empire. The Samhar strip of land behind both ports, Bruce learnt at the end of the eighteenth century, was 'a perfect desert', inhabited only from November to April, by a variety of wandering tribes called Tora, Hazorta, Shiho and Doba, who carried all their cattle inland for the other half of the year. 'When the season is thus reversed,' he adds, 'they and their cattle are no longer in Samhar or the dominion of the Naybe (Naib), but in the hands of the Abyssinians, especially the governor of Tigre and the Baharna-gash, who thereby, without being at the expense and trouble of marching against Masuah with an army, can make a line round

40. Guidi, *Annales Regum Iyasu II et Iyoas*, pp. 127-30, 143-7, 155; Budge, Vol. II, pp. 454-6. *Vide* also Beccari, Vol. IV, p. 151.

41. Bruce, Vol. III, pp. 5-6.

42. *ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 120.

43. Beccari, Vol. XIV, p. 436.

it, and starve all at Arkeeko and Masuah, by prohibiting any sort of provisions to be carried thither from their side.'⁴⁴

The restoration of Ethiopian rule at Massawa was not achieved however, by any such blockade; it did not take place for some one hundred and fifty years until the middle of the twentieth century.⁴⁵

44. Bruce, Vol. III, pp. 4-5.

45. *Vide* Pankhurst and Pankhurst, *passim*.

Chapter 28

The Ports and Foreign Trade

THE PRINCIPAL ports of the Horn of Africa to which reference is made in this period are, from north to south, Suakin, Dahlak, Massawa, Arkiko, Zeila, Berbera, Mogadishu, Brava and Malindi; most of these were in one way or another connected with Ethiopian trade.

Suakin

Suakin, the port mainly used by Ethiopian pilgrims, was, as we have seen, of only slight importance from the point of view of Ethiopian trade; it therefore falls outside the consideration of the present chapter.

Dahlak

The island of Dahlak, as has already been suggested, was of considerable economic interest as a source of supply for Red Sea shipping, and as an off-shore port for the African mainland. Corsali describes it in 1517 as an island of hills and valleys full of plum trees and others which bore no fruit. The greater part of the island's victuals, such as honey, millet, butter and a little wheat, came over from Ethiopia. Unlike many of the ports in this area, however, it was well supplied with sweet water and in the immediate interior there were good pastures, with many goats, camels and cattle. It was frequented by visiting sailors, and possessed good pearl fishing which was a monopoly of the local ruler.¹ Corsali's contemporary, Barbosa, confirms that it had 'great plenty of victual', adding that it dealt in 'much gold' from the interior of the Horn of Africa; it was, he said, 'mainly used by the Abexys (Abyssinians) of the land of Prester Joam'.²

De Castro, who visited it in 1541, just before his country's

1. *Historiale description*, p. 25.

2. Barbosa, p. 36.

intervention in Ethiopian affairs, says that the capital and port of Dahlak was on the coast facing Ethiopia and that between it and the mainland lay a number of smaller islands, the most important of which, Xamoa (Shumma) was about two leagues long and possessed several cisterns and wells. Dahlak's commercial importance had declined, however, since the old days, having lost trade to Suakin, Massawa, Aden and Jeddah. Its ruler spent the greater part of his time at Massawa where he was engaged in trade with the Ethiopians, which could then only be carried on at that port. From them he obtained 'much gold and silver' and returned to his own island only during the hot months of May and June when life was intolerable at Massawa.³

Massawa

Reference has already been made to the island port of Massawa, for a long time Ethiopia's principal gateway to the sea. The author of the *Carta* reported in 1521 that it had 'a very fine harbour, quite shut in', which was said to be better than that of Carthage. It possessed 'a very good anchorage', between 240 and 260 fathoms⁴ wide and 1,200 fathoms in circumference. It was made half of rock and half of land which appeared to have been won from the sea. On the rocky part there were 49 cisterns, 16 of which were 6 fathoms long, 3 fathoms wide and $2\frac{1}{2}$ fathoms deep; all were full of water and sealed.⁵

Massawa's principal exports at this time were, according to Alvares, gold, slaves, and agricultural produce. On account of transport difficulties this produce tended to come from the skirt of the plateau rather than from the interior. The Debaroa region, for example, produced 'numerous grain crops of every kind and nature' which were carried to the coast for sale at Mecca, Zabid, Jeddah, Toro (Mount Sinai) and other parts.⁶

Even when under hostile control, Massawa remained the Ethiopian empire's principal place of access to the Red Sea and therefore a trading centre of importance. Almeida reports that in his day some of its houses were of stone and mud, painted with lime or whitewash, while others were of wood and matting. There

3. Kammerer, *Le Routier de Dom Joam de Castro*, pp. 67-9.

4. A fathom is the length of the outstretched arms, hence 6 ft.

5. *The Discovery of Abyssinia*, p. 88.

6. Alvarez, p. 55.

were a number of cisterns and a bastion with a few guns at the entrance to the bar. The neighbouring water was not deep and could take only small craft such as those from Diu.⁷

Baltazar Telles, writing at about the same time, adds to this the following description of the port: 'Mazua (Massawa) is a small, flat and open Island, without any Fortification, divided from the Continent of Ethiopia by a Channel about a Musket Shot over. There is never a fresh Water Spring in it, nor any but what is gathered in Cisterns, when it rains, which not being sufficient to serve the Inhabitants, they have it daily brought from certain Wells on the Continent, near the Sea, and a League and a half from the Island towards the Mouth of the Red Sea.'⁸ Barradas, who confirms that three or four *sambuqs* arrived every day with water, states that if all the cisterns were full supplies would not last a month and that as the greater part were in fact broken and in disuse the island could not exist two days without resort to Arkiko.⁹

The pattern of trade at this time remained more or less unchanged. Almeida, for example, mentions the import of Indian cloth, carpets, silks and Mecca brocades, drugs, pepper, cloves, and 'a thousand other things' from Mecca and Jeddah,¹⁰ while Pero Pais says that there was much trade between India and the interior of Ethiopia.¹¹ Ludolphus declares: 'The Commodities Imported are . . . Garments of all sorts, Velvet, Silken, but chiefly Woolen and Fustian which the great Men wear instead of Purple which at this day they have lost the skill of Dying.'¹² Another import which was destined to remain an item of international trade for several centuries, was stibium, or antimony. Ludolphus states that 'they in their Language call (it) *Cuehol* or *Cohol* (*Kohl*) and believe it to be a great preserver of the Sight; nor do they less esteem it for Ornament and to beautify their Faces with it: For being powder'd they mix it with Soot moisten'd and with a small Pencil which they call *Blen*¹³ besmear their Eye-lids according to the frequent and ancient custom of the Orientals'.¹⁴

7. Almeida, pp. 181-2. *Vide* also Beccari, Vol. I, pp. 299-302.

8. Telles, p. 255.

9. Beccari, Vol. I, pp. 300-301.

11. Beccari, Vol. II, p. 269.

10. Almeida, p. 43.

12. Ludolphus, *Historia*, I, vii, 14.

13. *Blen* is the Amharic for the pupil of the eye.

14. *idem*, *New History*, p. 32.

'Wares for Exportation,' he concludes, 'they have few besides Gold, Skins, Hides, Wax, Honey and Ivory: Scarce anything else remarkable.' 'Many more,' however, 'they certainly might have, did the Habessinian Kings encourage Traffic and Merchandising and if the Country were more commodious for Carriage.'¹⁵ Massawa trade was still flourishing at the end of the seventeenth century. A Cypriot Jesuit, Antonius Nacchi, reporting from Cairo on 25 August 1698, records that the port was a place of much traffic and was frequented by numerous Indian and Ethiopian merchants, the latter arriving by caravan every month.¹⁶

Bruce, who like many travellers before and after him, entered Ethiopia by way of Massawa, provides us with a detailed description of the town in the later part of the eighteenth century, which suggests that it had developed somewhat since the time of Almeida almost a century and a half earlier. Most of the houses were still mainly composed of poles and grass, like those of Arabia, though there were also about twenty stone buildings, six or eight of which were of two storeys, though the second floor seldom consisted of more than one small room. The stones came from the sea or the rocky islands in the vicinity as was evident from their sea-shell incrustations.¹⁷

Situated on a small island 'immediately off the Abyssinian shore', Massawa, he confirmed, had 'an excellent harbour and water deep enough for ships of any size to approach the very edge of the island'; they might ride in the 'utmost security' from whatever point or with whatever degree of strength the wind might blow. This 'great convenience of commodious riding for vessels', joined to the 'valuable articles of trade' available there, had 'overcome the inconveniencence of want of water'.¹⁸

Massawa, he continues, was a place of great commerce; it possessed a share of the Indian trade, and served as the export centre for a considerable quantity of goods from the great tract of mountainous country behind it.¹⁹ Trade, however, was conducted in a 'slovenly manner' and imports were limited to articles which required only a small amount of capital, conditions being considered too precarious to risk a venture in valuable

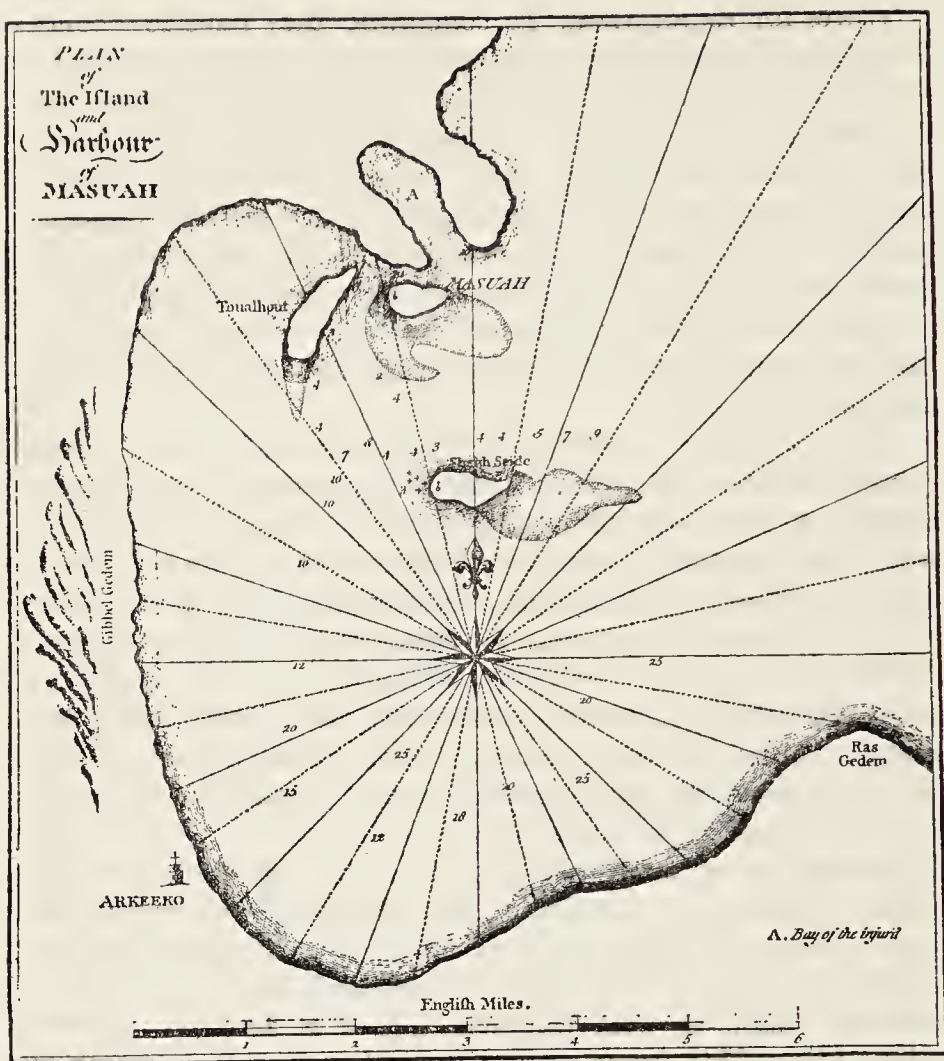
15. *ibid.*, p. 398.

16. Beccari, Vol. XIV, p. 486.

17. Bruce, Vol. III, p. 52.

18. *ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 4-5.

19. *ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 1.



Map of the Bay of Massawa showing the island port of Massawa and the mainland port of Arkiko.

From J. Bruce, *Travels to Discover the source of the Nile*.

commodities as 'the hand of power' entered into every transaction.²⁰

The main imports, he says, were textiles of various kinds: natural coarse cotton cloth known at Surat, blue cotton cloth and cochineal cloth called *kemis*, fine cloth from different parts of India, coarse white cotton cloth and unspun cotton in balls from the Yaman. Other imports included Venetian beads,

20. *ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 54-5.



Barelle, or glass bottle,
as imported into Ethiopia
in large quantities.

From H. Salt,
A Voyage to Abyssinia.

crystal, drinking-bottles called *barelle*,²¹ looking-glasses, and *kohl*, or crude antimony. These last-mentioned articles came from Cairo in 'great quantities' and were taken first to Jeddah in ships which went to that port for coffee; they were then carried across the Red Sea in small barks. Much profit was obtained, too, from the import into Ethiopia of old copper which was sold in 'great quantity'. Bracelets of this metal were worn by the Gallas and various tribes west of Gondar; near the country of the Gongas and Gubas it was even sometimes said to exchange for equal weight of gold. A univalve shell brought from the sea near Hodeida and sometimes also found at Konfodah and Loheia was also in considerable demand, a *cuba*²² fetching ten *paras*.²³ A few such shells were also found at Dahlak, but were

21. Bruce describes the *barelle* as 'a kind of glass bottle, very light, and of the size, shape and strength of a Florence wine-flask'. The neck was 'wider, like that of our glass decanters' and 'twisted for ornament sake', while the lips were 'folded back' and 'cannon-mouthed'. 'Thousands of packets' of these bottles were brought from Arabia to Gondar where they were in use for all liquors. Bruce, Vol. II, p. 678.

22. A wooden measure, containing 62 cubic inches of water.

23. See p. 268.

'not esteemed' though they passed for money among the Jawi and other western Gallas.²⁴

The principal Ethiopian exports brought to the coast at Massawa, Bruce states, were gold and ivory, elephant and buffalo hides, and, 'above all, slaves, of much greater value as being more sought after for their personal qualities than any other sort, who had the misfortune to be reduced to that condition'. Pearls, 'considerable for size, water or colour', were also found all along the coast.²⁵

Massawa prices, he considered, were unnecessarily high. Although situated in the very entrance of Ethiopia, 'a very plentiful country, all the necessities of life are scarce and dear'. Their quality, too, was 'very indifferent' because of the difficulty, expense and danger of carrying them through the desert country of Samhar between Arkiko and the Ethiopian plateau and also because of the extortions of the Naib who took, under the name of customs, whatever part he pleased of the goods and provisions brought to the island. The seller's profit was often so small as 'not to be worth the pains of bringing it'.²⁶

The following prices²⁷ were operative at the port :²⁸

Butter, 20 *rotol* :²⁹ $1\frac{1}{2}$ *pataca* and $3\frac{1}{2}$ *harf* (i.e. $45\frac{1}{2}$ *harf*).

Goats : half a *pataca* each.

Sheep : two-thirds of a *pataca* each.

Wheat, an *ardep*, or sack : 4 *pataca*.

Durra, from Arabia, an *ardep* : 2 *pataca*.

Water, 7 gallons : 3 *diwani* or *para*.

Gold, 1 *oquea* (10 drachms) : 16 *pataca*.

Civet, 1 *oquea* : $1\frac{3}{4}$ *pataca*.

Elephants' teeth, 35 *rotol* : 18 *pataca*.

Wax, 1 *frasula* :³⁰ 4 *pataca*.

Myrrh, 1 *frasula* : 3 *pataca*.

Coffee, 6 *rotol* : 1 *pataca*.

Honey, 1 *cuba* (62 cubit inches) : $\frac{1}{4}$ *pataca*.

24. *ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 54-5.

26. *ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 5.

25. *ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 2.

28. *ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 53, 55.

27. For a relative table of Massawa currency at this time see p. 268.

29. According to the French scientific mission of 1839-1843 the Massawa *rotile* was roughly equivalent to a pound in weight. Lefebvre and others, Vol. III, p. 84.

30. *Frasula*, normally about 17 kilogrammes, but subject to much regional variation.

Most of these commodities were shipped to Mecca, where a former Abyssinian slave called Metical Aga acted on behalf of the Emperor and Ras Mikael, selling gold, ivory and civet, sending back in return firearms for the ruler of Tigre.³¹

Trade, it appeared, was no longer in the hands of Indian merchants, or Banians, as formerly. 'The Banians', Bruce says, 'were once the principal merchants of Masuah; but the number is now reduced to six. They are silversmiths that make ear-rings and other ornaments, for the women of the continent and the assayers of gold; they make, however, but a poor livelihood.'³²

Arkiko

Goods disembarked at Massawa were mainly transported to Arkiko upon which place the island port relied for most of its victuals, as well as almost all its water. The author of the *Carta*, observing that Arkiko, which was in his time under Ethiopian rule, lay two cross-bow shots away from Massawa, added that it was well supplied with foodstuffs. Provisions were 'countless and very cheap'. There were large numbers of gazelles, cows, sheep and goats, and hares were so numerous that they could be killed on foot. Meat was therefore very cheap; the largest cow cost no more than four or five pieces of linen cloth and a sheep or goat could be obtained for a single piece.³³

Almost a century later Almeida described the place as composed of 'a few, very flimsy, storeyed houses' where the *Quequea* (Kekia), the Turkish *Kaimakan* or lieutenant-governor, resided. It had many wells with good drinking water which was carried every day to Massawa in three or four skiffs or *gelvas* (*jalba*). Water was also used in a number of small gardens with different kinds of green vegetables, lemons and pomegranates. On his first visit, there was no fort except an enclosure of stone and mud ten palms high, but in July 1633 he saw a square fort apparently built of stone and lime, or, as some said, of stone and mud. It adjoined the governor's houses and had four bastions which, like the wall, were twenty to twenty-five palms high.³⁴

31. Bruce, Vol. I, p. 275.

32. *ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 55.

33. *The Discovery of Abyssinia*, p. 88.

34. Almeida, pp. 181-2. The Kekia, or Checchia, family has remained at Arkiko to the present day.

Telles, who corroborated this account, added : 'The people of Mazua not being able to subsist without Water, it is requisite for them to be the Masters of Arquico (Arkiko), on Account of the Wells, and therefore the Turks have there erected a Fort with four Bastions, and Curtains but weak, and low, and all the work seems to be of Stone and Clay, yet supposing it were of Lime and Stone, two Hours Battery would lay it level with the Ground by reason of its Thinness. On the Bastion, there are some Falconets and Drakes sufficient to fright the Natives, but not any that understand the Art of War. The Governor whom the Turks call Quequea has his House adjoining to the Fort; and about it is a Wall of dry Stone within which the Garrison Soldiers live, being about sixty or eighty white Turks, and as many Arabs and Mungrels.'³⁵

The other northern ports, as we have seen, were of relatively little importance. Barradas notes, for example, that though to the south-east of Arkiko the bays of Zulla and Bur both possessed good roadsteads, they were unable to enjoy a prosperous trade with Ethiopia on account of the proximity of the Turks.³⁶ Defalo, farther along the coast, was 'too shallow' according to Almeida and was therefore 'not frequented by boats';³⁷ Barradas, who says that *sambuqs* could reach its shore, confirms that it had scarcely any commercial value, though the Turks found it useful in enabling them to approach the salt mines the trade of which they taxed.³⁸ The Dankali port of Beilul was scarcely more important, for Barradas observes there was no river or roadstead there of any significance, larger shipping being obliged to anchor relatively far out at sea. The port was moreover almost devoid of articles of trade, except for locally made mats, a very small quantity of dates, and butter made from goats' and camels' milk. This latter was, however, available in great abundance.³⁹

Zeila

To the south-east the ports of Zeila and Berbera in the Gulf of Aden appear to have had their hey-day in medieval times; their subsequent decline may be ascribed to the interruption of

35. Tellez, p. 255.

36. Beccari, Vol. I, p. 299.

37. Almeida, p. 14.

38. Beccari, Vol. I, p. 298.

39. *ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 298.

Arab trade with the East as a result of Portuguese intervention, to the invasions of Grañ and of the Gallas which drove the Ethiopian capital, an important centre of consumption, northwards out of Shoa, and to the discovery of the sea route to the East round the Cape of Good Hope which by-passed them altogether.⁴⁰

The Arabs afford us many a useful glimpse of both these ports in their period of greatness. In the middle of the tenth century Al Masudi mentioned Zeila as a place belonging to the Abyssinians, while Istakhri said it was their sole port of transit for Hijaz and the Yaman.⁴¹ Two centuries later Al Idrisi called it a small but populous town frequented by many travelling merchants and visited by ships from Qulzum which brought all kinds of merchandise bound for 'Habash'. The exports of Zeila, he said, consisted mainly of slaves and silver, though there was also occasionally a little trade in gold.⁴² Early in the thirteenth century another Arab writer, Ibn al Wardi, called it 'the emporium of Habash', while his compatriot, Shems ed Din Abu Abdallah Mohamed (1256-1327), claimed with obvious exaggeration that gold was so plentiful there that it was worth no more than iron.⁴³

In the fourteenth century the Arab geographer Ibn Said described it as an export centre for slaves and horses from Abyssinia,⁴⁴ while at about the same time Ibn Battuta noted that it was 'a large city with a great bazaar', but complained that it was 'the dirtiest, most abominable, and stinking place in the world' because of the 'quantity of its fish and blood of the camels slaughtered in the streets.'⁴⁵ Another contemporary Arab, Abul Fida (*d.* 1331), also referred to it as a prosperous port serving Habash.⁴⁶

This picture is corroborated by Portuguese and other European writers of the early sixteenth century. Albuquerque relates that he saw many ships from Zeila, as well as from Berbera, trading on the Arabian coast, and noted that they carried provisions and slaves to Mecca and Jeddah, which latter place

40. Bruce, Vol. II, p. 355 *et passim*; Minorsky, pp. 473-4.

41. Devic, p. 54.

42. Dozy and de Goeje, pp. 29-30.

43. Salt, p. lxvi; Mehren, p. 280.

44. Guillain, Vol. I, Part I, pp. 236-7; Devic, pp. 54-5.

45. Ibn Battuta, p. 110.

46. Devic, pp. 54-5; Reinaud, Vol. II, p. 231.

was obliged to import all its supplies by sea, mainly from Zeila, Berbera and Massawa.⁴⁷

Ludovico di Varthema says that the ruler of Zeila had 'many soldiers, both foot and horse' and that the people, though badly armed, were very warlike; they nevertheless lived 'extremely well' and enjoyed 'excellent justice'. Though a 'bad port' with 'poor walls' it was 'a place of immense traffic, especially in gold and elephants' teeth'. A 'great number' of slaves captured from the people of Prester John by the Moors were also exported thence to Persia, Arabia Felix, Mecca, Cairo and India. There was 'a great abundance of provisions' in the city and many merchants; much grain grew there, as well as 'much animal food'; there was also oil in great quantity, made not from olives, but from *zerzalino*,⁴⁸ and honey and wax in plenty

Turning to the livestock he had seen at the port he blends accurate reporting with rather fanciful description: 'Here is found', he says, 'a kind of sheep, the tail of which weighs fifteen or sixteen pounds, and with the head and neck quite black, but the whole body white. There are also some sheep, which have tails a *brazzo*⁴⁹ long and twisted like vines, and they have the dewlap like that of a bull, which almost touches the ground. Also in this place I found a certain kind of cows, which had horns like a stag(?) and were wild, which had been presented to the sultan of the said city. I also saw here other cows (oryxes?), which had a single horn in the forehead, which is a *palmo*⁵⁰ and a half in length, and turns more towards the back of the cow than forwards. The colour of these is red, that of the former is black.'⁵¹

Barbosa, who called at the port a decade later, writes in similar vein. He describes it as 'a well-built place with right good houses, many of them built of stone and mortar, with flat roofs'; it was a 'place of great traffic' visited by 'many ships'; the inhabitants had 'many horses and reared much cattle of all kinds' with the result that they had 'butter in plenty, milk and flesh', as well as a 'great store of millet, barley and fruits of divers sorts' all of which they carried to Aden. Barbosa also reports the

47. Birch, Vol. I, p. 58; Vol. IV, pp. 27, 28, 35, 58.

48. Oil seeds.

50. Span.

49. The length of an arm.

51. Varthema, pp. 86-8.

capture and destruction of the place in 1517 by the Portuguese Governor of India, Lopo Soares d'Albergaria.⁵²

Corsali, whose Portuguese companions attacked the town on that occasion, confirmed that it was rather large, without any walls, but well supplied with wheat, cattle and fruits of various kinds unknown in Europe. Like Berbera to the east it yielded meat and other produce to Aden and Mecca. It was visited, he said, by many ships from Aden and India which came laden with much merchandise, principally cloth, pepper and incense from Dufar in Arabia. These articles were then transported by *kafila* or camel trains as far as Ethiopia, the 'land of Christian Churches'.⁵³

Zeila appears to have recovered quickly from the Portuguese attack, for its importance was emphasized by the Emperor Lebna Dengel in his conversations with the first Portuguese mission in the early fifteen twenties. As already stated he proposed that it should be occupied by the Portuguese, like Suakin, Dahlak and Massawa, in order to destroy the power of the Arabs; he claimed that it was 'well supplied with victuals and exported to Aden, Jeddah and Mecca and all Arabia, its produce being sent as far as Toro (Mount Sinai), and Cairo'.⁵⁴ He further underlined the significance of the place in a letter to Diego Lopes de Sequeira, then Portuguese governor of the Indies, in which he declared that it was 'a port of much provisions for Aden, and all parts of Arabia and many countries and kingdoms; and those kingdoms and lands have no other favour except what comes to them from Zeila'.⁵⁵ A century later another Portuguese observer, Bernado Pereira, reported in 1624 that caravans of a thousand camels and other beasts of burden were arriving from the interior with grain, ivory and slaves.⁵⁶

Berbera

The nearby port of Berbera enjoyed similar prosperity. Its inhabitants were converted to Islam in the thirteenth century; Abul Fida, a century later, stated that it depended on the rulers of Habash and catered for their foreign trade. His contemporary, Ibn Said, noted that it supplied slaves to the neighbouring Muslim countries, while the Persian geographer, Abd-el Moal,

52. Barbosa, pp. 35-6.

55. *ibid.*, pp. 371-2.

53. *Historiale description*, pp. 32-3.

56. Beccari, Vol. XII, p. 67.

54. Alvarez, p. 204.

writing at about the same time, maintained that slaves exported from this area were preferred to those of Nubia, Ethiopia or Senega(?). The port was renowned also for its horses which enjoyed a great reputation among the Arabs; the Arab writer Imrolkais emphasizes the quality of the local horses in telling the imaginary story of a noble steed from there which journeyed from the Roman Empire to Arabia.⁵⁷ In the fifteenth century the Italian traveller, Nicolo de Conti (1385?-1468?), called the port the gateway to Ethiopia,⁵⁸ while early in the following century Brother Thomas told Zorzi that it was one of the principal ports used by the Prester.⁵⁹

Berbera was captured by a Portuguese fleet under Antonio de Saldanha in 1518, according to Barbosa, who stated that it was frequented by 'many ships' carrying 'much merchandise' from Aden and Cambay, which brought away gold, opium(?), ivory and divers other things'. The merchants of Aden in particular, took on board much provender, such as meat, honey and wax, for which Berbera was said to be 'exceedingly fruitful'.⁶⁰

In the general area of Berbera and along the coast eastwards to Cape Guardafui, which the Arabs called Ras Aser (or Cape of the Slave), lay a number of ports of subsidiary importance. Al Idrisi mentions, for example, Mancuba, Acant, Bacati (or Nacati), Batta, Juah, and Qarfuna; the last-mentioned may be identified as Yerdefun called by the Portuguese Guardafui. To the south, in the Indian Ocean, he lists Termah, which Abul Fida later referred to as Bermah, and Khakni (or Khaquni) which Abul Fida called Khafuni and Ibn Said, Hafuni. This was the same as the modern Ras Hafun, which Masudi had first mentioned in the tenth century.⁶¹

Barbosa refers to the port of Metee the Less, to the east of Berbera, which may have been the Mundus of the *Periplus*, where he found much meat though little trade had developed; and still farther to the east he found Cape Guardafui a busy port. Beyond the Gulf of Aden to the south, he described Afum (Ras Hafun) as being well supplied with meat and other food, but having no harbour and only little trade.⁶²

57. Devic, pp. 52-3.

58. Longhena, p. 159.

59. *Ethiopian Itineraries*, p. 167.

60. Barbosa, pp. 24-5.

61. Devic, pp. 56-8.

62. Barbosa, p. 33.

Mogadishu and Brava

To the south lay the trading station of Mogadishu, the importance of which was noted early in the thirteenth century by the Arab geographer, Obeid Allah Yaqut, who said that visiting merchants came there to purchase sandalwood (frankincense?), ebony,⁶³ ambergris,⁶⁴ and ivory. These traders, he related, were received as guests by local merchants, thus facilitating successful commerce. A century later Ibn Battuta, who called the place 'an enormous town', related that its inhabitants were merchants who had 'many camels', hundreds of which were slaughtered every day. Describing the way in which a visitor traded, he states: 'When a vessel reaches the port, it is met by sambuqs, small boats, in each of which are a number of young men, each carrying a covered dish containing food. He presents this to one of the merchants on the ship, saying, "This is my guest", and all the others do the same. Each merchant on disembarking goes only to the house of the young man who is his host, except those who have made frequent journeys to the town and know its people well; these live where they please. The host then sells his goods for him and buys for him, and if anyone buys anything from him at too low a price or sells to him in the absence of his host, the sale is regarded by them as invalid. This practice is of great advantage to them.'⁶⁵

Vasco da Gama, who passed the port two centuries later on his first voyage to the East, called it 'a large town with houses of several storeys, big palaces in its centre and four towers around it.'⁶⁶ Barbosa confirms that in his day, too, Mogadishu was a 'very great' town ruled by a king and controlled by an Arabic-speaking people who had few weapons but used herbs to poison their arrows. The country possessed 'flesh-meat in great plenty, wheat, barley, horses, and fruit of divers kinds' so that it was 'a place of great wealth'. It enjoyed much and varied trade and was visited by many ships from Cambay and Aden bringing 'great plenty of cloths' of many sorts, spices and other wares,

63. Presumably a black wood resembling ebony, which does not in fact grow in East Africa. Devic, pp. 61-2; Guillain, Vol. I, Part I, p. 235.

64. A waxy substance found in tropical seas, produced by a secretion of the sperm whale, and greatly valued in perfumery. *Vide* Devic, pp. 188-94.

65. Ibn Battuta, pp. 110-11. *Vide* also Reinaud, Vol. II, pp. 232-3.

66. Coupland, p. 38.

taking away much gold, ivory, wax and other things; the merchants made 'exceedingly great profits in their dealings'.

Farther to the south again, Brava was another 'great town' which, he said, had 'very fine stone and mortar houses'. It had no king, but was ruled by the elders or ancients of the land who were held in the highest esteem and had the 'chief dealings in merchandise of different kinds'. This place had also recently been destroyed by the Portuguese who on that occasion 'slew many of its people and carried away many into captivity', taking 'great spoil of gold and silver goods'. The survivors had fled inland but after the destruction wrought by the Portuguese they had resettled and soon became as prosperous as before.⁶⁷

The Western Route

Ethiopia did not import or export merchandise exclusively by way of the above-mentioned ports. At certain periods the overland route westwards to the Sudan and thence to North Africa carried a considerable volume of trade. Alvares states that in his day Moors from Tunis travelled via Cairo to Ethiopia bringing 'white burnouses, but not very good ones, and other produce',⁶⁸ though Tomé Pires believed that 'very little' produce went by this way to Cairo.⁶⁹ Horses, as we have seen, were also imported from Sennar, as is confirmed by Pero Pais who on one occasion saw the arrival of a herd of four hundred and seventy from that country.⁷⁰

De Maillet, writing over half a century later, emphasized the importance of this trade route. In a letter of 2 May 1698 he noted that the Emperor's trade agent, Haji Sei, had informed him that the goods he carried on this thousands of years old route paid no tax to the king of Sennar. On the contrary, the latter gave the Emperor an annual gift of six horses, though as a token of friendship rather than as tribute.⁷¹ In a subsequent report of 24 September 1701, listing the type of imports which were in his opinion guaranteed a good sale in Ethiopia, De Maillet declared that the most profitable articles to take into the country as presents to the Emperor and other persons of influence were with few exceptions items of small value. These included guns, preferably double-barrelled ones decorated with silver, or

67. Barbosa, pp. 30-1.

68. Alvarez, p. 153.

69. Pires, p. 17.

70. Beccari, Vol. III, p. 346.

71. *ibid.*, Vol. XIV, p. 34.

those which fired several shots; silver watches, silver and gold being esteemed almost equally; glittering jewellery; magic lanterns; distorting mirrors; peep-show boxes showing palaces and important views of France; highly coloured representations of the French royal family in which the king should be depicted wearing a crown according to Ethiopian custom; and various crude unframed pictures of no value, which could be packed into small space, for presentation to the Abuna and to the churches. He added that Murad had reported that the Emperor was anxious to obtain some waterproof material for two suits of clothing, having heard from Poncet that it was available in France. Other suitable presents included gold and silver lace, needles, pins, scissors, small mirrors decorated with silver, imitation precious stones of all colours mounted on rings, earrings, yellow amber and coral bracelets, bright glassware which, he claimed, was better made in France than in Venice, coloured glass, and spectacles to be handed round to people at court – in short, as large as possible a number of gaudy articles that caught the eye. He also expressed the view that any party visiting Ethiopia would be relatively immune from interference if accompanied by a Turk, as the Ethiopians would be reluctant to interfere with him, being afraid of Turkish reprisals against either the Egyptian Copts or their own compatriots travelling to or from Egypt to accompany a new Abuna.⁷²

De Maillet's contemporary, Poncet, gives further details of this trade entering Ethiopia from the west. He records that the kingdom of Sennar's imports from Egypt and beyond, much of which passed on to Ethiopia, were, 'spices, paper,⁷³ brass, iron, brass wire, vermilion, sublimate,⁷⁴ white and yellow arsenic,⁷⁵ iron ware, *spica* of France,⁷⁶ *mahaleb*⁷⁷ of Egypt, Venice ware, which are several sorts of glass beads of all colours, and lastly black to blacken, which they call *kool* (*kohl*), and is very much

72. *ibid.*, Vol. XIV, pp. 178–81.

73. A manuscript copy of part of the *Senkesar*, or 'Lives of the Saints', written on paper and dating from the reign of the Emperor Iyoas (1755–1769) is housed in the National Library of Ethiopia. Manuscripts of paper are most rare in this period.

74. Perhaps blue sublimate, made of mercury, flowers of sulphur and sal ammoniac, used in medicinal preparations.

75. White arsenic is arsenic trioxide and yellow arsenic is arsenic trisulphide.

76. *Spikenard*, an aromatic substance employed in the preparation of an ointment or oil.

77. *Mahlab* (arabic), a strongly scented grain.

esteemed in that country, because they make use of it to blacken their eyes and eyebrows'. 'All these commodities', he adds, 'have a good vent in Aethiopia, with this difference that at Sennar the large beads of glass are most esteem'd and in Aethiopia the lesser.'⁷⁸ Slaves from Ethiopia and elsewhere also found a good mart at Sennar, the stronger and most robust fetching ten crowns a piece.^{79, 80} Elsewhere Poncet relates that the King of Sennar had a customs official at Chelga (twenty-five miles south-west of Gondar) 'by consent of the Emperour of Aethiopia . . . to receive all the duties of the cotton which they bring from his Kingdom into Aethiopia'; those duties were equally divided between the two rulers.⁸¹

Three-quarters of a century later Bruce refers to Ras el Fil as a kind of buffer state between Ethiopia and Sennar. He said that it had formerly consisted of thirty-nine villages to which the Arabs of Atbara had come to trade in butter, honey, horses, gold and many other commodities. The Shaikh of Atbara, who lived on the frontier of Sennar, had formerly enjoyed good relations with his neighbour, the Shaikh of Ras el Fil, and had sent him every year a Dongola horse, two razors and two dogs, receiving in return a present of a mule and a female slave. 'The effect of this intercourse' had been 'to keep all the intermediate Arabs in their duty'. Since the abortive expedition of Iyasu II against Sennar in 1742-1744,⁸² however, there had been no peace between the two states, though those Arabs who had assisted the Emperor and were defeated with him lived on the frontiers of the realm and enjoyed his protection. The chiefs of Atbara and Ras el Fil nevertheless understood each other 'perfectly'. If the Arabs of the area paid their tribute to either it was divided equally between both, the Emperor of Ethiopia in this way being furnished with many 'heavy horses'.⁸³ Ras el Fil had formerly paid him 400 ounces of gold (4,000 crowns) and Sanacho, some sixty miles to the north-east, a quarter of that sum, but since Iyasu's expedition 'many people' had left and gone to Cherkin (a region some twenty miles southwards,

78. Poncet, p. 107.

79. *ibid.*, p. 105.

80. The French crown was equivalent to about 4s. 6d.

81. *ibid.*, p. 113.

82. For an account of this campaign, *vide* Crawford, *The Fung Kingdom of Sennar*, pp. 239-43.

83. Bruce, Vol. IV, p. 325.

towards Laka Tana) though the Emperor's demands had not, however, been lessened on this account.⁸⁴ The Cherkin trade had also suffered from molestation by Shanqella raiders, though their ability to interfere had declined in the last thirty years, as they had suffered greatly from smallpox.⁸⁵

On the whole, Bruce concluded, Sennar was no longer prosperous. 'Formerly, when the ways were open and merchants went in caravans with safety,' he said, 'Indian goods were brought in quantities to Sennaar from Jidda and then dispersed over the black country. The return was made in gold, in powder called Tibbar (gold dust), civet, rhinoceros's horns, ivory, ostrich feathers, and, above all, in slaves.' This commerce, however, was now 'almost destroyed', though gold, ivory and slaves were still marketed; the trade in gold was in the hands of Muslim and pagan merchants from the Sudan, while that in slaves was carried out by Dabaina Arabs who were great hunters and crossed into Ethiopia without fear. Bruce considered that the main cause of slackening in commerce in this area was 'the violence' of the Arabs and 'the faithlessness' of the government of Sennar which had closed that country's trade on every side but that of Jeddah, whither caravans continued to go once a year by way of Suakin.⁸⁶

84. *ibid.*, Vol. IV, p. 327.

85. *ibid.*, Vol. IV, p. 311.

86. *ibid.*, Vol. IV, pp. 485-6; Vol. II, p. 563.

Chapter 29

Trade in the Red Sea and Indian Ocean

UNTIL THE early sixteenth century the ports and hinterland of the Horn of Africa benefited considerably, as we have seen, from the fact that they lay along an important international trade route. Sailing in the Red Sea and Indian Ocean still followed a seasonal pattern dictated by the *monsoon*. Albuquerque, who waited with his Portuguese fleet in the Gulf of Aden in August 1507 to attack Muslim shipping, noted, for example, that in that season many boats left Berbera and Zeila 'and all the Red Sea' for Diu, Cambay and the Malabar coast. The return journey from India took place between November and March. Those boats which set out in this last month, however, hugged the coast of Guardafui and passed by way of Berbera and Zeila because the westerly winds began to blow at that time.¹

Aden, which the Moroccan traveller, Ibn Battuta, described in the thirteen twenties and thirties as a prosperous port visited by both Indian and Egyptian merchants, continued to enjoy a central position in this entrepôt trade between East and West, as is testified by numerous European observers. The Italian, Ludovico di Varthema, describing the situation in the years from 1503 to 1508, declared that the port was 'the rendez-vous' for ships from India, 'Major and Minor', Ethiopia and Persia, as well as for all craft bound for Mecca, and added that this port and Jeddah received most of their provisions from the Ethiopian coast.²

The Florentine, Andrea Corsali, who, as we have seen, was said to have established 'warehouses' in Ethiopia, wrote in a letter of 18 September 1517 to Duke Lorenzo dei Medici, that Aden received great quantities of spices, medicinal drugs, herbs for tanning, fragrant herbs, precious stones, silks and cotton cloths, as well as merchandise from the Levant; the produce of the Far East was transhipped to Arabia, Syria, Asia

1. Birch, Vol. I, p. 58; Vol. IV. pp. 10-1. *Vide* also Ranking, p. 148.

2. Varthema, pp. 37-8, 31, 60.

Minor, to such places as Damascus and Aleppo, and also to the Ethiopian coast. The greatest quantity of goods, however, was taken to Mecca, Sidon, Suez and other ports en route for Cairo, Alexandria and Europe.³ He elsewhere describes seeing many ships at Aden loaded with sheep, fresh water and fruit, as well as other merchandise, such as rose-water,⁴ raisins from Damascus, almonds, and opium from India. This last-mentioned article was imported into both Ethiopia and Arabia, and was smoked by the Moors and others who prized it greatly.⁵

Tomé Pires, describing the period from 1512 to 1515, relates that Cairo merchants brought to Aden gold, silver, quicksilver, vermilion, copper, rosewater, camlets, coloured woollen cloth, glass beads, weapons and 'things of that kind' from Italy, Greece, Damascus and elsewhere. The Aden merchants in turn shipped the above-mentioned goods to Cambay, and also sent there the produce of other regions: madder,⁶ raisins, opium(?) and rose-water, as well as gold and silver, and horses from Zeila, Berbera, Suakin and Arabia. From India they brought back rice, wheat, soap, indigo, butter (ghee), oils, carnelians,⁷ coarse pottery similar to that of Seville, and all kinds of cloth, as well as the produce of Malacca and lands farther to the East: cloves, nutmeg, mace, sandalwood, brazilwood, silks, seed pearls, musk and porcelain. All these articles found a good market in Zeila, Berbera, Sokotra, Kilwa, Malindi, Mogadishu and various places in Arabia.⁸ Pires adds that the Deccan region of southern India produced white and coloured cloth and black beads, which were in considerable demand in Abyssinia.⁹ This trade, he explains, was 'carried out by ships from Aden and ships from Cambay, many of one and many of the other'.¹⁰

The Abyssinians, he relates, were visited by merchants from Aden, Sherer in Hadramaut and the Red Sea ports of Fartak, Dahlak and Suakin, the things most in demand in Abyssinia being rosewater, dried roses, all kinds of beads, crystal, coarse cloth from Cambay, silks, white cloths, dates and opium. Dried roses and rosewater, he adds, were found in large quantities in

3. *Historiale description*, p. 21.

4. Rosewater was used at the Ethiopian court. *Vide* Bruce, Vol. IV, p. 94.

5. *Historiale description*, pp. 32-3.

6. The root of a plant used medicinally and as a source of crimson dye.

7. Or cornelian, a variety of chalcedony, a semi-transparent quartz, usually of a deep red colour used for seals.

8. Pires, p. 43.

9. *ibid.*, p. 53.

10. *ibid.*, p. 43.

the land of Sana, and were 'much prized in Abyssinia'.¹¹ The importation of such articles as roses, rosewater and opium, would seem to suggest the growth of luxury tastes in the period immediately before Grañ's war. 'The principal Abyssinian merchandise', he adds, 'were gold, ivory, horses, slaves and foodstuffs';¹² pearls were also exported from Dahlak, an island which he describes as 'in Abyssinia or subject to it'.¹³ The two ports of Zeila and Berbera constituted an 'outlet for the whole of Abyssinia', and together with Suakin, supplied much meat, fish, wheat, barley and millet to the Arabian port of Jeddah.¹⁴ To these ports the Arabs brought coarse cloths of many kinds, rice, glass and other beads from Cambay, raisins from Aden, and dates from Ormuz; they took back the traditional gold, ivory and slaves.¹⁵ Aden merchants also sent coarse cloth and 'various trifling things' to Berbera and Zeila in exchange for gold, horses, slaves and ivory; they supplied cloth to Dahlak in exchange for pearls; to the island of Sokotra they sent cloth and straw from Mecca, returning with Socotrine aloes and 'dragons' blood'.¹⁶ The Arabs also sold similar commodities to the East African ports of Kilwa, Malindi, Brava, Mogadishu and Mombasa.¹⁷

Duarte Barbosa, whose report on the area was completed in 1518, corroborated these accounts of the Aden trade, stating that this port carried on extensive commerce with Zeila and Berbera, as well as with Massawa and the country of Prester John. From these and other East African ports, he said, came 'many ships with foodstuffs in abundance' which were exchanged for a 'great store of spices and drugs, cotton cloths and other wares of the great Kingdom of Cambaya' (Cambay).¹⁸ He adds that ships entering the Red Sea from the Gulf of Aden came from many parts of India, including the Kingdom of Cambay, Chaul, Dabul, Batical, Malabar, and the Bengal coast, as well as from countries even farther afield, such as Ceylon, Malacca, Sumatra, Burma and China.¹⁹ He confirms that the whole coast of East Africa was well supplied with gold brought down from the land of Prester John. All the places on the coast had dealings with the inland country, and supplied it with cloth and other wares

11. *ibid.*, p. 18.

12. *ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

13. *ibid.*, p. 17.

14. *ibid.*, pp. 11, 17.

15. *ibid.*, p. 14.

16. A dark red resin.

17. *ibid.*, p. 14.

18. Barbosa, p. 16.

19. *ibid.*, p. 33.

in exchange for a 'great store of gold', ivory, honey, wax and slaves.²⁰

Merchants from the Horn of Africa appear to have joined in this trade as they had done in the time of Cosmas, a millennium earlier. Ludovico di Varthema relates that merchants from Ethiopia (probably Muslims) travelled as far as Calicut.²¹ Tomé Pires recalled that Gujerati sailors engaged in the Cambay trade had formerly been accompanied in their ships by traders from many parts of the Middle East and the East African coast. In Pires' list Abyssinians take their place alongside many other nationalities, such as people from Cairo, Ormuz, Kilwa, Malindi, Mogadishu and Mombasa, Persians, Rumes, Turkomans, Armenians, Guilans, Khorasanians and men of Shiraz.²² At Malacca, too, foreign traders had included Abyssinians, together with Moors from Cairo, Mecca, Aden and Ormuz, men of Malindi, Rumes, Turks, Turkomans, and Christian Armenians.²³

As has already been suggested, the Ethiopian Christians, however, were not skilled in foreign trade. Considering the situation in the middle of the seventeenth century, by which time commerce had admittedly deteriorated, the learned Ludolphus writes: 'The Habessines of their own accord never care to stir out of their Native Country, as being ignorant of Foreign Languages and Regions; nor can they distinguish between the European Nations which they believe to be all Franks and their Religion the Latin Worship; only they can tell the English from the Dutch Merchants. Neither do they understand the way of Exchange or Keeping Correspondence. Besides they are deterred by their own Poverty from undertaking such dangerous Journeys through so many uncouth Deserts.'²⁴

The foreign trade of the Horn of Africa suffered greatly in the early sixteenth century from the Portuguese conflict with the Arabs. Albuquerque refers, for example, to the sinking by his compatriots of twenty Zeila ships of 'great size',²⁵ while Barbosa describes the destruction a few years later of the Arab trading establishment at Zeila, Berbera, and Brava. He adds that in his day vessels from the East travelled in constant danger of inter-

20. *ibid.*, pp. 37-8.

21. Varthema, p. 60.

22. Pires, p. 260.

23. *ibid.*, p. 34. Guilan, Khorasan and Shiraz were parts of Persia.

24. Ludolphus, pp. 392-3.

25. Birch, Vol. IV, p. 58.

ception from the Portuguese men-of-war who lay in wait for them at Cape Guardafui. He says that they often captured great booty as they seized any Moorish vessels they could, claiming that these sailed in defiance of the King of Portugal's prohibition.²⁶ Such interference by the Portuguese had serious repercussions throughout the East. Corsali reports, for example, that the thriving commerce of Malacca, Calicut, Ormuz and Aden came to an end, and Indian merchants were obliged to withdraw into the hinterland of the sub-continent; farther afield Venice and Cairo also suffered from the suspension of this trade route.²⁷

Moreover the Portuguese, who were mainly interested in the Indies, never really replaced the Arabs as a trading power in East African waters. By developing the trade route round the Cape of Good Hope they caused commerce in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden to decline. Ports like Massawa, Zeila and Berbera, which had flourished when international trade passed by their shores, fell on leaner days as the seas in question became more and more a backwater from the point of view of world commerce.

Grañ's invasion and the subsequent period of warfare in Ethiopia gravely affected the trade of the interior of the Horn of Africa, though despite this Arab-Faqih, writing of the war years, mentions the continued export of gold, *wars*²⁸ (a yellow dye), ivory, civet and slaves which, he states, were the principal exports to Arabia;²⁹ a little later Bermudes remarks that the invader was interested in the trade in gold, ivory, civet, incense, myrrh, drugs and slaves.³⁰

The emergence of Turkish influence over the Red Sea area in the following decades dealt a further blow to Ethiopian foreign trade, especially after the capture of Massawa, their principal port, in 1557. Although the Turks, and later their local representatives, the Naibs, were not averse to allowing Ethiopian trade to pass through the port, they exacted heavy and arbitrary customs fees. Massawa was therefore declining in importance when Bruce visited it in the second half of the eighteenth century. 'The oppression of the Turks', he wrote, 'put the finishing hand to the ruin of the India trade in the Red Sea,

26. Barbosa, p. 53.

27. *Historiale description*, p. 21.

28. *Memecylon tinctorium*.

29. Arab-Faqih, p. 70.

30. Whiteway, p. 140.

begun some years before by the discovery of the Cape of Good Hope and the settlements made by the Portuguese on the continent of India'.³¹

Despite the above-mentioned difficulties, Ethiopia's foreign trade, as we have seen, continued to be considerable throughout the period covered by the present volume.

31. Bruce, Vol. III, pp. 2-3, 249.

Chapter 30

Chinese Trade

CHINA'S TRADE with the Horn of Africa, though not as ancient as that of Egypt or India, is of considerable interest, for it shows that East Africa had commercial intercourse with the most distant land on the Asian continent. Though trade with China was, as it were, only an extension of East Africa's foreign trade, which found its most regular market in the Red Sea and Indian Ocean area, we have deemed it worthy of discussion under a separate heading, especially as Chinese records at this period happen to be more detailed than those of most other trading nations of the East.

Chinese trade with the Horn of Africa had been proceeding for centuries before the epoch covered by this chapter, though scholars nowadays reject the suggestion of the sinologist, A. Hermann, who supposed that the live rhinoceros which arrived at the court of the Chinese Emperor Ping (A.D. 1-6) came from the Ethiopian coast. The Chinese record of the event describes the animal as a native of Huang-chih, which Hermann identified as the country of the Agazi or Agazian, the Geez-speaking people of Ethiopia. It is now believed that the animal came from a country far nearer to China, perhaps Malaya, India or Indonesia.¹

There is clear evidence, however, that by the time of the Tang dynasty (618-907) the Chinese were acquainted with at least part of the Horn of Africa and were trading indirectly if not directly with the Somali coast. The Chinese scholar, Tuan Cheng-shih (*d.* 863), describes the country of Po-pali, which may be identified as modern British Somaliland, in his book *Yu-yang-tsa-tsu*, as follows :

'The country of Po-pali is in the south-western sea. (The people) do not eat any of the five grains but eat only meat. They often stick a needle into the veins of cattle and draw blood which they drink raw, mixed with milk. They wear no clothes except

1. Duyvendak, pp. 10-11.

that they cover (the parts) below their loins with sheepskins. Their women are clean and of proper behaviour. The inhabitants themselves kidnap them, and if they sell them to foreign merchants, they fetch several times their price. The country produces only ivory and ambergris.² If Persian merchants wish to go into the country, they collect around them several thousand men and present them with strips of cloth. All, whether old or young, draw blood and swear an oath,³ and then only do they trade in their products. From olden times on they were not subject to any foreign country. In fighting they use elephants' tusks and ribs and the horns of wild buffaloes as lances and they wear cuirasses and bows and arrows. They have twenty myriads of foot soldiers. The Arabs make frequent raids upon them.⁴

Three centuries later this region is described as an Arab dependency in a work entitled *Chu-fan-chih* written by Chau-Ju-Kua, a foreign trade commissioner in Fukien province.⁵ This book was completed in 1226, but contains information drawn from an earlier document, the *Ling-wai-tai-ta*, written in 1178 by Chou-Chu-fei. 'The country of Pi-pa-lo', it declares, 'has four *chou*⁶ (departmental cities) and for the rest (the people) are all settled in villages which each try to gain the supremacy over the others by violence. They serve Heaven and do not serve the Buddha (presumably meaning they are Mohammedans). The country produces many camels and sheep and they have camels' meat and milk as well as baked cakes as their regular food. The country produces dragon's saliva (ambergris), big elephants' tusks, and big rhinoceros horns. Some elephants' tusks weigh more than 100 *catty*⁷ and some rhinoceros horns more than 10 *catty*. There is also much putchuk⁸, liquid storax,⁹ gum, myrrh, and tortoise-shell which is extremely thick, and which (people from) other countries all come to buy. "Among the

2. A waxy substance found floating in the Indian ocean, produced by the secretion of the sperm whale or cachalot. It is highly valued in perfumery.

3. Presumably the Muslim *fateha* said at the beginning of an expedition or new undertaking. *Vide* Johnston, Vol. I, pp. 61-2.

4. Duyvendak, pp. 13-14.

5. Hirth and Rockhill, p. 117.

6. Perhaps the four trading vilages of Avalites, Malao, Mundus and Mosylum mentioned in the *Periplus*.

7. Usually the equivalent of 1½ lb. avoirdupois or 604·8 grammes.

8. A plant with medical properties.

9. A resin used in the preparation of incense.

products there is further the so-called camel crane (i.e. the ostrich, called by the Persians *ushturmurgh* and by the Arabs *teir-al-jamal*, both meaning 'camel bird') whose body to the crown is six or seven feet high. It has wings and can fly, but not to any height."¹⁰ Among quadrupeds there is the so-called *tau-la* (giraffe), striped like a camel and in size like an ox. It is yellow in colour. Its front legs are five feet high and its hind legs are only three feet. There is also a mule (zebra?) with red, black, and white stripes wound as girdles around the body. Both (these kinds) are animals of the mountain wilds. They are occasional variations of the camel. The inhabitants are fond of hunting and from time to time they catch them with poisoned arrows."¹¹

Chau-Ju-Kua also mentions that China imported much *wu-na-tsi*, or civet. He says that it was largely obtained from the Arabs; doubtless much of it originated in the Horn of Africa and was exported from Zeila and neighbouring ports, as was the case three centuries later in the time of Grañ.¹²

China's trade with Africa probably reached its apogee during the Sung dynasty (960-1280). Already in 943 the Arab writer, Al Masudi, describes the shipment of slaves to China from as far south as Zanzibar which he designated as the region of the Blacks from the River Jubb (Juba) to Sofala.¹³ By the end of the tenth century the Chinese government was issuing special licenses to induce foreign traders dealing in African goods to come to China. The Sung records relate that an envoy from Tseng-tan (Zanzibar?) came to the court with presents in 1071 and again in 1083. These records also indicate that between 1049 and 1053 the annual importation of elephants' tusks, rhinoceros horns, strings of pearls, aromatics, incense, etc., was over fifty-three thousand units of count. By 1175 this annual amount had risen to over five hundred thousand units. We do not, unfortunately, know how much a unit was, but the figures, on any showing, indicate a great expansion of trade.¹⁴

Chou-Chu-Fei, whose work of 1178 has already been referred to, reveals the wide extent of Chinese trade at this time when

10. The passage between double inverted commas was quoted from the *Ling-wai-tai-ta*.

11. Hirth and Rockhill, pp. 128-9; Duyvendak, pp. 14-15.

12. Hirth and Rockhill, p. 234; Whiteway, pp. 140, 232.

13. Hirth and Rockhill, pp. 127, 214.

14. Duyvendak, p. 16.

he asserts that elephants' tusks, rhinoceros horns and large numbers of slaves were imported into China from as far away as Kun-lun-Tseng-chi which the Dutch sinologist, J. J. L. Duyvendak, identifies as Madagascar. Chau Ju-Kua, the careful trade inspector whose analysis of commerce has also been mentioned, relates that Tseng-ha (Zanzibar) exported elephants' tusks, native gold, ambergris, and yellow sandalwood, while Chung-li (the Somali coast) exported cattle, sheep, camels, frankincense, dragon's blood,¹⁵ aloes, tortoise-shell and ambergris.¹⁶ This region, together with the Zanzibar coast, was, according to the sinologists F. Hirth and W. W. Rockhill, an important supplier of ivory to China.¹⁷ Gujerati and Arab traders, we are informed, visited these regions every year bringing white cotton cloth, porcelain, copper and red cotton.¹⁸

Chinese exports at this time consisted mainly of gold, silver, copper, coins, silk and porcelain. As a writer of the Sung period said: 'Coins were originally treasures of the Middle Kingdom, but are now in common use with the barbarians of the four kingdoms.' Fear that the export of coin would result in a 'cash-famine', however, later produced legislation prohibiting the export of Chinese currency and specifying that only silk, porcelain, brocade and lacquered wares should be used as payment for foreign goods. Chinese coins minted after the prohibition, however, have been discovered at a number of places on the east coast of Africa, particularly at Mogadishu, Brava, Kilwa and Zanzibar.¹⁹ The regulations were evidently honoured as much in the breach as in the observance.

Until the Yuan Dynasty (1280-1368) China's African trade was almost entirely in the hands of Persians, Arabs and Indians, but thereafter Chinese vessels entered the field in increasing numbers. East-West trade was lively, though Hirth and Rockhill doubt whether Chinese merchants had themselves begun to visit Africa. Indirectly, however, they had learnt from foreign merchants. The triangular shape of Africa already appears in the *Mongol Atlas* of Chu-ssu-pen and Kuang-yu-tu, on a map with data of around 1300, but the continent was still not on the main

15. A dark red resin.

16. Hirth and Rockhill, pp. 126, 130-1.

17. *ibid.*, pp. 232 n, 127 n.

18. *ibid.*, p. 126.

19. Wainwright, *passim*.

trade route from the Far East to Europe which passed to the north via Ceylon, Hormuz and Bagdad, and thence to the Mediterranean sea-ports. Wang Ta Yuan, writing in 1350, tells us that the principal products of Tseng-yao-lo (Zanzibar) were red sandalwood, dark red sugar-cane, elephants' tusks, ambergris, native gold and 'duck-bill' or copper sulphate. These articles, he explains, were exchanged for ivory boxes, trade silver and coloured satins.²⁰

During the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) trade with Africa entered a new phase. The Islamisation of Persia in the fifteenth century closed the old routes between China and Europe, and trade was diverted by way of Cambay, Aden and Alexandria.²¹ The Chinese government now made an unparalleled effort to organize foreign trade. Between 1405 and 1433 a series of great naval expeditions was dispatched. A stone inscription erected in 1432 and found at Chang-lo in the province of Fukien, declared that 'the Imperial Ming Dynasty, in unifying seas and continents' had surpassed the achievements of the Han and Tang dynasties and had received presents from 'countries beyond the horizon and at the ends of the earth'. The Emperor, we are told, had ordered the author of the inscription, a certain Chêng Ho, and others 'at the head of several tens of thousands of officers and flag troops to ascend more than a hundred large ships to go and confer presents on them in order to make manifest the transforming power of the (imperial) virtue and to treat distant people with kindness'. The countries visited are listed as follows: Chan-cheng (Champa), Chao-wa (Java), San-fo-chi (Palembang), Hsien-lo (Siam), Hsi-lan-shan (Ceylon), Ku-li (Calicut), Ko-chih (Cochin), Hu-lo-mo-ssu (Hormuz), A-tan (Aden) and Mu-ku-tu-shu (Mogadishu). 'We have traversed more than one hundred *li* of immense waterspaces,'²² the inscription concluded, 'and have beheld in the ocean huge waves like mountains rising sky-high, and we have set eyes on barbarian regions far away and hidden in a blue transparency of light vapours, while our sails, loftily unfurled like clouds, day and night continued their course (rapid like that) of a star, traversing those savage waves as if we were treading a public thoroughfare. Truly this was due to the majesty and the good fortune of the

20. Rockhill, p. 624.

21. Schreike, p. 15.

22. This phrase has no precise meaning, as the *li* is here used figuratively.

Court, and moreover we owe it to the protecting virtue of the Celestial Spouse.²³ The African coast, we learn, was visited in 1417-9 and again in 1421-2 in what were respectively the fourth and fifth expeditions. The former expedition brought Chinese vessels as far as Mogadishu, Brava and Malindi, while the latter took them again to Mogadishu and Brava.

The principal articles offered for sale by these expeditions were gold, silver, beads, silks, satins, cloth, porcelain, chinaware, rice, beans, cloves, nutmeg, pepper, sandalwood, musk, putchuk, sapanwood and iron bars. In return they obtained lions, leopards, rhinoceroses, camels, zebras, oryxes, ostriches, sheep, gold coins, pearls, precious stones, ivory, amber, rugs, frankincense, ambergris, aloes, myrrh, liquid storax, benzoin²⁴ and 'dragon's blood'.²⁵

The Chinese, it will be noted, regarded the African coast largely as a source of exotic or luxury articles which were prized in court circles. Considerable excitement was created at the court in 1416 when a giraffe arrived from Ma-lin (Malindi), an African country with which the Chinese had not hitherto entertained any relations. Duyvendak has published a translation of a poem by one Shên Tu in praise of this event. The giraffe is here called a *ki-lin*, for the Chinese mistook the Somali word *girin* (giraffe) for *ki-lin*, their own name for a fabulous animal more or less like a unicorn :

'In a corner of the western seas, in the stagnant waters of a great morass,

Truly was produced a *ki-lin* whose shape was high 15 feet,
With the body of a deer and the tail of an ox, and a fleshy
boneless horn,

With luminous spots like a red cloud or a purple mist.

Its hoofs do not tread on (living) beings and in its wanderings
it carefully selects its ground,

It walks in stately fashion and in its every motion it observes
a rhythm,

Its harmonious voice sounds like a bell or musical tube.²⁶

Gentle is this animal that in all antiquity has been seen but
once.

The manifestation of its divine spirit rises up to Heaven's
abode.²⁷

23. Duyvendak, pp. 28-9.

24. A type of resin.

25. Mills, p. 14.

26. The giraffe is actually mute.

27. Duyvendak, pp. 34-5.

Evidence of the growing interest in far-off countries is to be found in the official history of the Ming Dynasty. The country of Djubo (Juba) and its inhabitants, are described as follows:

'They live in solitary and dispersed villages. The country is situated in a remote corner of the west. The walls are made of piled-up bricks and the houses are masoned in high blocks. The customs are very simple. There grow neither herbs nor trees. Men and women wear their hair in rolls: when they go out, they wear a linen hood. The mountains are uncultivated and the land is wide; it rains rarely. There are deep wells worked by means of cog-wheels. Fish are caught in the sea with nets. The products of the country are lions, gold-spotted leopards, and camel-birds which are six or seven feet tall. There are Dragon's Saliva (ambergris), incense and golden amber. As merchandise are used vermilion, coloured silks, gold, silver, porcelains, pepper, coloured satins, rice, and other cereals.' The description is followed by a poem which ends with the words: 'If one's eyes wander (over this country) one meets only sighs and sulky glances, desolation, the entire country nothing but hills'!²⁸

There are descriptions also of Mogadishu and Brava. It is stated that at Mogadishu the houses were four or five storeys high, and that the inhabitants were quarrelsome and practised archery. The wealthy engaged in navigation and traded with distant countries. Dried fish was supplied as food to camels, horses, cattle and sheep.

Fei Hsien, writing in 1436, describes China's principal imports from Pu-la-wa (Brava) as oryxes, zebras, leopards, deer, rhinoceroses, myrrh, frankincense, ambergris, elephants' tusks and camels, which were exchanged for gold, silver, satins, silks, rice, beans and chinaware.²⁹ Chu-pu (Juba) supplied lions, gold coins(?),³⁰ leopards, ostriches, frankincense and amber in exchange for vermilion(?), satins, light silks, gold, silver, chinaware, pepper and rice.³¹ The 'native products' of Mu-ku-tu-shu (Mogadishu) were frankincense, gold coins, leopards and ambergris, which were exchanged for gold, silver, coloured satins, sandalwood, rice, chinaware and coloured taffetas. The Chinese writer, Ming Shih, mentions the same imports for Brava and

28. *ibid.*, pp. 30-1.

29. Rockhill, p. 614.

30. Presumably a re-export as no coins were struck except at Mogadishu.

31. Rockhill, p. 615.

Juba except that, for the latter region, he adds pepper to the list.³²

Archaeological research underlines the importance of China's trade with the Horn of Africa. Field work has revealed fragments of Chinese pottery along almost the entire coast of East Africa from the Gulf of Aden to Zanzibar. Colonel A. T. Curle of the British Colonial Service, describing his investigations into the ancient towns of British Somaliland, writes: 'Fragments of Celadon³³ vessels were found on every site, and pieces large enough to date have been assigned to the Sung and Ming dynasties in the region of the twelfth to fifteenth centuries. Fragments of blue and white porcelain came to light on every site; these, while difficult to date, are generally attributed to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.'³⁴

J. S. Kirkman, Warden of the Coastal Historical Sites of Kenya, who has examined finds along the coast of that territory, writes in similar vein. He mentions the discovery of 'large quantities' of Chinese Celadon, the earliest considerable import of which he attributes to the second half of the fourteenth century. 'This (contrary to what has been said in the past)', he writes, 'was not Sung but Ming with some Yuan.'³⁵ Moulded glass beads and cone glass from Malaya were also imported at this time.³⁶ In the fifteenth century, he adds, there was a great increase in the volume of Chinese trade, largely due to the prosperity of the Ming Dynasty and its demand for ivory, which could then only be obtained from Africa. Blue and white Chinese porcelain of this period, as well as green glazed wares from the Islamic world, came 'in Arab dhows which at least as early as the ninth century A.D. were regularly visiting Chinese ports. . . . The principal motive for trade with Africa and the prime factor in the development of the part of the coast now known as Kenya was ivory – the hard currency for trade with China. Medieval China lacked only three commodities: ivory, frankincense and spices, and of these three Kenya then, as it does today, provided large quantities of the most important, ivory. It was exchanged for porcelain from China and glazed earthenware from the Islamic world, and of the two, porcelain was preferred'.³⁷ In the

32. *ibid.*, p. 617. 33. A type of greenish porcelain.

34. Curle, p. 320.

35. Kirkman, *The Culture of the Kenya Coast*, p. 92.

36. Kirkman, *Historical Archaeology in Kenya*, p. 18.

37. Kirkman, *The Arab City of Gedi*, p. 95.

sixteenth century, however, Celadon became scarce and Islamic glazed wares more plentiful. These latter imports appear to have come mainly from Persia. The 'surprising absence of Mameluk wares', Kirkman adds, 'is a strong argument against imports from Egypt. . . . The single class of European ware is Iberian, probably Portuguese majolica,³⁸ of the first half of the sixteenth century, brought by the Portuguese. This was derived from Islamic tin-glazed wares of the Eastern Mediterranean'.³⁹

Dr. G. P. S. Freeman-Grenville, describing Chinese porcelain found in Tanganyika, observes: 'Before the mid-fourteenth century there was probably no steady import of Chinese ware. From then on, there is hardly a single reign of a Chinese emperor not represented in the finds of porcelain up to the mid-nineteenth century. . . . The vast majority of the finds belong to the reigns of the Chin Dynasty of Emperors Kang-hsi (1662-1722), Yung Chen (1723-1735) and Chien Lung (1736-1795). The mass are of cheap wares intended for common use from provincial kilns of types not to be found among the superior wares in museum collections in Europe and the United States.'⁴⁰

A similar picture can be drawn from the Chinese coins found along the East African coast. The coins, unlike the pottery, are mainly of the early period before the sending of official Chinese expeditions to Africa. Thus, whereas coins of the Sung period are by no means rare, few examples have been found of the Ming and Ching dynasties, though porcelain of this period was evidently imported in great quantities. This may perhaps be explained by the fact that the prohibition on the export of currency was more fully enforced in this period. (See Appendix D.)

According to Duyvendak, official Chinese relations with far-off states were brought to a close after 1433. Some time before 1500 Chinese ships had ceased to cross the Indian Ocean, though it is clear from the archaeological evidence quoted above that articles continued to be exchanged between China and Africa by means of Arab, Indian, Portuguese, Dutch and English carriers. Neither the *Hsi Yang Chao Kung Tien Lu* of 1520 nor the *Tung Yang Kao* of 1618 make any reference to

38. A richly coloured and ornamented glazed pottery.

39. *ibid.*, pp. 95, 149.

40. Freeman-Grenville, p. 63.

Africa. Considerable knowledge of the area is still evident, however, in the map of Mao Kun (1511-1601) which was reproduced by his grandson, Mao Yuan-Yi in a book called *Wu-pei-chih* or *Records of Military Preparedness* presented to the throne in 1628. Among the places that can be identified are: Atan (Aden), Ha-pu-ni (Han-pu-hsi, Habash, or Abyssinia), Pu-la-wa (Brava), Mu-ku-tu-shu (Mogadishu), Man-pa-sa (Mombasa) and Ma-lin-ti (Malindi).

Chapter 31

The Slave Trade

THE FREQUENT wars which occurred during the period covered by this volume were accompanied by a considerable growth of the slave trade,¹ which gradually assumed considerable dimensions. The establishment of Arab trading centres, argues Trimingham in *Islam in Ethiopia*, was accompanied by a great expansion of the slave trade which was based on the ports of Suakin, Dahlak, Zeila, Berbera, Mogadishu, Merca, Brava and, farther south, Mombasa, Kilwa and Zanzibar.² These towns were mainly composed of huts of grass with few permanent buildings and were thus easily rebuilt if destroyed in war. Trimingham adds that the expansion of Islam into the south of Ethiopia was probably due to slave raiding expeditions which subsequently developed into regular conquests.³

Professor Coupland, discussing the economics of the slave trade from East Africa as a whole, observes that slaves 'ranked high among the raw materials of Africa which the Arabs were busy exchanging for the manufactured goods, the cloth and metal-work and beads, of India, Persia and Arabia'. It was, he adds, 'from first to last, on this "middleman's" trade that their little urban societies on the coast supported themselves. The economic basis of their life, indeed, was almost wholly mercantile. They manufactured little themselves. Ibn Battuta records that a fine cloth was woven at Mogadishu and exported to Egypt; and Al Idrisi had heard of iron-mines being worked at Malindi and Sofala; but those are the only allusions made by any of the Arab travellers to the existence of local industries for overseas markets'.⁴

The institution of slavery, it should be noted, was generally accepted in this period by all the peoples of the Middle East. It was formally recognized by the *Fetha Nagast*, the Ethiopian legal code, partly based on Mosaic law, which was translated

1. Bruce, Vol. II, p. 24.

2. Trimingham, p. 61.

3. *ibid.*, pp. 62, 66.

4. Coupland, pp. 35-6.

from a thirteenth-century Arabic text of the Copt, Ibn Al Assal. Affirming that all men were basically free, as God had created them, this document nevertheless asserted that the law of war caused the vanquished to become the slaves of the victors. It therefore sanctioned the taking of slaves from among unbelievers, and ruled that the children of slaves belonged to the masters of their parents. Each of these declarations rested on strong Biblical foundations, for, as the code pointed out, the Lord God had declared: 'Both thy bond-men and thy bond-maids, which thou shalt have, shall be of the heathen that are round about you; of them shall ye buy bond-men and bond-maids. Moreover, of the children of the strangers that do sojourn among you, of them shall ye buy, and of their families that are with you, which they begat in your land; and they shall be your possession. And ye shall take them as an inheritance for your children after you; they shall be your bond-men for ever.'⁵

Notwithstanding this clear sanction of slavery and the slave trade, the *Fetha Nagast* tried in some measure to restrict its scope. It forbade the selling of Christians to non-believers, and specified that the manumission of slaves was a work of perfection and the most important form of alms-giving. It was especially recommended in seven different circumstances: (1) if a slave had served his master's parents, forefathers or kinsmen; (2) if he had been baptized by his masters or wished to become a priest or a monk; (3) if he became a soldier; (4) if he had saved his master from death; (5) if his mother had been freed while he was in her womb; (6) if after being taken prisoner in war he returned to his master on his own account; (7) if his master died without heir. On the other hand, the code stated that a master's decision to liberate his slave could be reversed by a judge were it shown that the slave had behaved in an insolent or brutal manner either to him or his children or had maladministered his estate. The master, moreover, was not supposed to free any slave unable to provide for himself as a free man.⁶

The character and direction of the slave trade from the Horn of Africa in this period can be documented both from the accounts of travellers in the area and from the history of the countries to which the slaves were exported.

5. *Leviticus*, xxv. 44-6.

6. Guidi, *Il 'Fetha Nagast'*, pp. 298-9.

In the fourteenth century, during the hey-day of the Islamic sultanates, the Egyptian Ibn Fadl Allah reported that the greatest number of eunuchs from Abyssinia were exported through the Muslim province of Hadya and came from 'the country of the infidels'. He had learnt from a merchant called El Hajj Faraj el Funi that the castration of slaves was expressly forbidden by the ruler of Amhara, i.e. by the Emperor of Ethiopia, who considered it an abomination and took active steps to prevent it. Castration continued, however, in the village (or region?) of Waslu(?) where it was carried out by brigands who owed him no allegiance. They were the only people in the whole of Abyssinia, Ibn Fadl Allah said, who dared to do so. Merchants often therefore took their slaves to Waslu for castration, as this operation greatly increased their price. The victims were then brought to Hadya to recover, but the number who died of the operation was thought to be greater than those who survived.⁷ The seizure of Ethiopian slaves at this time is also referred to in the chronicle of Amda Tseyon (1314-1344).⁸

There is reason to suppose that the slave trade was intensified in subsequent centuries. During the reign of Eskender (Alexander, 1478-1494) Mahfuz, the Amir of Zeila and *de facto* ruler of Adal, took advantage of the strict Ethiopian Lent to make constant inroads into Christian territory, driving off, as Bruce records, 'whole villages of men, women and children, whom he sent into Arabia or India to be sold as slaves'. The Amir, who continued his depredations for a quarter of a century, on one occasion, Bruce asserts, killed or drove away no fewer than nineteen thousand Christians, 'great numbers' of whom were dispatched as slaves to Arabia. The number of prisoners was, in fact, so great that Bruce found no difficulty in describing such campaigns as 'but another species of trade'. During the reign of the Emperor Naod (1494-1508) the famous monk Endreyas is reported to have told the Ethiopian soldiers that there was more merit in saving one Christian village from slavery than fasting for the whole of their lives. Mahfuz was shortly afterwards routed, whereupon, Bruce says, the King of Adal, 'not a little terrified' at the defeat of his neighbour and ally whom he had hitherto considered invincible, quickly gathered

7. Gaudefroy-Demombynes, pp. 16-17, 32.

8. Bruce, Vol. II, p. 24.

together all the slaves in his possession and returned them to the Emperor. Mahfuz, however, rallied his forces and continued his depredations. He was finally defeated and killed by the Emperor Lebna Dengel in 1516, but slave-raiding continued, especially as a result of the introduction of firearms by the Turks, which took place at about this time and greatly strengthened the power of the rulers in Adal.⁹

Sixteenth-century European travellers in the Red Sea area were fully aware of the extent of the slave trade. Ludovico di Varthema, as we have seen, refers to the export at Zeila of slaves from the country of Prester John, while Tomé Pires reports that the people of Arabia were constantly at war with Abyssinia and made ceaseless raids across the Red Sea, attacking on horseback and carrying off 'large numbers' of Abyssinians for sale in Arabia.¹⁰

Though the Arabs were the greater culprits in the slave trade from East Africa, the Portuguese also played an important part in it, making frequent raids on the coast and carrying off many Muslims. Christians, on the other hand, were often spared. Albuquerque's son relates, for example, that when his father sailed along the Arabian coast in 1513 he found opposite the island of Jebel Zakur a group of 'Abyssinian women and youths whom the Moors were carrying to sell in Juda' (Jeddah). Knowing that they were Christians from the land of Prester John, he 'would not allow them to be made captives'. He tried, however, to seize as many Muslims as he could for slaves, but on that occasion took only a few as 'most of them saved themselves by swimming off, and those who remained he punished by cutting off their hands and noses . . . and in a like manner he served all those whom he took inside the [Red Sea] straits, except those of Camarão (Kamaran Bay) because he had determined to make a treaty of peace with that land'.¹¹

Barbosa also refers to Portuguese slave-raiding at Brava and Zeila, especially at the latter place where the Portuguese Governor of India took many female children. Corsali reported to Duke Lorenzo dei Medici that the Portuguese ship on which he sailed found about five hundred Muslims at Zeila on the eve

9. *ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 115-16, 122-4, 126, 136-7.

10. Pires, p. 14.

11. Birch, Vol. IV, p. 28.

of St. Mary Magdalene's day, 1517, and having killed the eldest, seized the remainder as slaves. He adds that on arriving at Aden his shipmates were approached by several Moors from Zeila who were anxious to buy back their compatriots.¹²

Alvares indicates that a considerable slave trade was under way at the time of his visit to Ethiopia from 1520 to 1526; he observes that Arabia, Persia, Egypt, India and Greece were 'full of slaves from this country' and that he had heard that they 'made very good Moors and great warriors'.¹³ Slaves, being easy to transport, came from farther afield than most exports of the Horn of Africa. Those purchased in Damot, he states, were particularly prized by the Moors who would 'not leave them for any price'. It was said that on entering Damot a good slave could be obtained for three or four pieces of salt, though in the land where they were captured they were valued at only one piece. The existence of slaves from Damot, it may be added, is referred to in a legal text by the contemporary Arab writer, Bahraq (1465-1524).¹⁴ The slave trade, Alvares continues, was in the hands of the Moors, who sold men, women and children to Arabia and Persia, Egypt and India, but also to the Portuguese.¹⁵ The ruler of Adal, he added, was continually fighting the Christians of Ethiopia and was assisted in this conflict by supplies of arms and horses from the 'King of Arabia', the Sheikh of Mecca and other 'Moorish kings and lords'. In return for this aid the King of Adal sent to these patrons 'large offerings' of 'many Abyssinian slaves' whom he captured in war.¹⁶ Confirming that in their struggle with the Turks for control of the trade routes to the East the Portuguese also captured many Christian slaves who had been taken by the Arabs, Alvares adds that when they discovered their identity they 'at once freed them and clothed them very well, because they knew they were Christians'.¹⁷

Grañ's invasion and the subsequent Turkish occupation of the Massawa-Arkiko area led to a further increase in the slave trade. Grañ's chronicler, Arab-Faqih, states that his master (like the King of Adal before him) took large numbers of prisoners whom he sent as slaves to Arabia, presenting many of them in particular

12. Barbosa, pp. 35-8; *Historiale description*, pp. 32-3.

13. Alvarez, pp. 348, 99.

14. Serjeant, pp. 2, 6.

15. Alvarez, p. 259.

16. *ibid.*, p. 302.

17. *ibid.*, p. 302.

to Amir Soliman of Zabid.¹⁸ Undoubtedly large numbers of Ethiopians were captured and sold in slavery in this manner.¹⁹ In 1624, for example, a Portuguese observer, Bernado Pereira, reported that no less than six boats had left Zeila with Abyssinian slaves for Mecca.²⁰

The Turks in their day were also very active in the slave trade. The agreement of 1626 between the Emperor Susneyos and the ruler of Massawa, which, as has been observed, was framed with the assistance of the Jesuits, contained an article prohibiting Turkish raiding, but not the slave trade as such. It forbade commerce through the port of all slaves not brought by caravan from the interior and specified that the Massawa authorities must return any slaves should either their relatives or the Jesuit fathers prove that they had been abducted.²¹ This clause, however, was soon a dead letter.

Baratti, who travelled inland from Massawa a generation later, states that the Turks were ruthlessly raiding the coastal area under their control. 'We advanced far into the Country many days' journey,' he recalls, 'before we came to the Turks' Army; they were upon their return from pillaging the Christians, they were laden with spoils and slaves.' Commenting on this trade in human beings, which appalled him, he adds: 'Noblemen's children were seen, who by their Meen and Garb were distinguishable from the ordinary sort. These poor creatures were led to be sold in Turkey and other places as beasts, and the worst is, they were forced to renounce their Religion. What a grief was it to their Christian Parents, to suffer such a loss, to have their sons and daughters amongst the infidels.'²² It is quite possible that Abraha or Ibrahim, the great-grandfather of the Russian poet, Alexander Pushkin, was seized in this way from the coastal area of Turkish domination as is discussed in Appendix F.

The Jesuit Telles suggests that in this period the local ruler of Jinjero was also actively promoting the trade. 'Whenever the King of Jinjero buys any rare Goods, brought to him by

18. Arab-Faqih, pp. 43-4. *Vide* also Ross, p. 593.

19. Arab-Faqih, pp. 62, 67, 138, 161, 164, 204, 212, 347, *et passim*. *Vide* also Perruchon, *Le Règne de Lebna Dengel*, p. 284; Conzelman, pp. 123, 141; Conti Rossini, *Historia Regis Sarsa Dengel*, pp. 43, 52, 96, 134, 168.

20. Beccari, Vol. XII, p. 67.

21. *Lettere annue di Ethiopia*, p. 179.

22. Baratti, pp. 21-2.

foreign Merchants,' he says, 'he agrees to give them in Exchange, ten, twenty, or more Slaves, to which Purpose he only sends his Servants, who going into any House indifferently take away the Sons or Daughters of the Inhabitants, and deliver them to the Merchants. The same he does, whensoever he presents a Slave or Slaves to any Person of Note, ordering the best and handsomest to be taken.'²³

Susneyos was said to be strongly opposed to the slave trade. The Jesuit Azevedo says the Emperor was accustomed to be read to by one of his learned men, Alaqa Kristos, before going to sleep. It is said that on one occasion the reading touched upon the orders which João III of Portugal had given to his viceroy, João de Castro, prohibiting him from selling slaves to either the Moors or the Turks. The Emperor was much impressed and immediately commanded that his subjects likewise should have no dealing in slaves with either of these groups. A rich Muslim trader was subsequently accused of exporting slaves from Enarea, and on being found guilty was executed, his head being stuck on a pole in the market-place as a warning against future law-breakers. The Emperor reiterated his opposition to the trade, declaring that anyone caught trading in slaves with either Moor or Turk would be sentenced to death and have all his property confiscated. At the same time he summoned his governors and the ministers of the court and instructed them, on pain of severe penalty, to enforce the law, as God wished to protect the unfortunate Ethiopians, who, we are told, were then being transported in large numbers to Arabia, India, Cairo and Constantinople.²⁴ It should be noted, however, that Susneyos, as well as some of the subsequent rulers of the Gondar period, are mentioned by Bruce as taking part in the capture of slaves on their western frontiers, particularly among the Shanqellas.²⁵

The slave trade, nevertheless, continued to flourish throughout our period, largely on account of the long succession of wars.²⁶ Bruce states that in his day female slaves from Enarea were

23. Telles, p. 200.

24. Beccari, Vol. XI, p. 421.

25. Bruce, Vol. II, pp. 231, 293, 300, 305, 438, 454, 551, 631-2; Vol. III, p. 737.

26. Guidi, *Annales Iohannis I, Iyasu I, et Bakaffa*, pp. 11, 14, 17, 28, 30, 32, 33, 34, 47, 77, 117, 119, 137-8, 142, 168, 179, 186, 196, 204, 234, 235, 240, 271, 278; *idem*, *Annales Regum Iyasu II et Iyoas*, pp. 118, 138, 139, 140, 145, 289.

'more esteemed' at Constantinople, India and Cairo 'than those of any part of the world' and that the men of Enarea were 'reckoned faithful, active and intelligent'. Being familiar only with the northern part of the Horn of Africa, he limited his comments to the trade through Massawa and ignored the almost equally important routes through the southern ports. He estimates that some five hundred slaves were exported annually from Massawa, though in times of great demand this figure might be increased fourfold. In normal years the export would be composed of perhaps three hundred Pagans who came via Gondar, and two hundred Christians who had in one way or another been kidnapped. He asserted that the principal centre for the trade in Tigre was Digsä. 'It is true of Dixan as, I believe, of most frontier towns,' he observes, 'that the bad people of both contiguous countries resort thither. The town consists of Moors and Christians, and is very well peopled; yet the only trade of either of these sects is a very extraordinary one, that of selling children. The Christians bring such as they have stolen in Abyssinia to Dixan as to a sure deposit; and the Moors receive them there, and carry them to a certain market at Masuah, whence they are sent over to Arabia or India.' He also asserts that the trade was connived at by Ras Mikael, the Governor of Tigre, as it contributed to his greatness by paying for the import of firearms into his province, and that the Naib of Arkiko levied a tax of six *patacas* on every slave exported. He adds that the kidnapping of children was sometimes even carried out by members of the clergy, an allegation which, as will be seen in a later volume, was emphatically denied by Eduard Rüppell, the distinguished German traveller of the eighteen thirties.²⁷

Bruce, like many of his contemporaries in Europe, was by no means a strong critic of slavery or the slave trade. 'On the eastern side of the peninsula of Africa,' he wrote, 'many thousand slaves are sold to Asia, perfectly in the same manner as those on the west side are sent to the West Indies; but no one, that ever I heard, has as yet opened his mouth against the sale of Africans to the East Indies; and yet there is an aggravation in this last sale of slaves that should touch us much more than the other, where no such additional grievance can be presented. The slaves sold into Asia are most of them Christians; they are sold to

27. Bruce, Vol. III, p. 91.

Mahometans, and, with their liberty, they are certainly deprived of their religion likewise. But the treatment of the Asiatics being much more humane than what the Africans sold to the West Indies meet with, no clamour has yet been raised against this commerce in Asia, because its only bad consequence is apostasy.'²⁸

'I cannot think', he observes, 'that purchasing slaves is, in itself, either cruel or unnatural. To purchase any living creature to abuse it afterwards is certainly both base and criminal; and the crime becomes still of a deeper dye when our fellow creatures come to be the sufferers. But, although this is an abuse which accidentally follows the trade, it is no necessary part of the trade itself; and, it is against this abuse the wisdom of the legislature should be directed, not against the trade itself.'²⁹

The magnitude of the slave trade from the Horn of Africa may be illustrated by the great frequency with which such slaves appear over the centuries in the history of Arabia, Egypt, India and even China.³⁰ It is unfortunately often very difficult to ascertain the exact geographical area from which they came; in most cases we have few biographical details of their early life and they were normally taken to places in the Islamic world where they became converted and adopted Muslim names, thereby abandoning their former designations which would have indicated their place of origin.

Reference has already been made to the fact that as early as the seventh century a sizeable Ethiopian slave community existed in Mecca; one of its members, Bilal, is remembered as Mohamed's *muezzin* and was called by the prophet 'the first fruits of Abyssinia'. In the same period we find the prophet exhorting the people of Madina to dig a trench round the city to resist a 'confederation' of Ethiopian mercenaries and Bedouin Arabs who were waging war against them.³¹ Over a hundred years later in 749 four hundred *Zinjs* (or 'blacks' from Africa) are said to have taken part in the campaigns of that year in Bagdad having been enrolled in the service of the city's ruler, Abul Abbas. A further century later in 850 they rose in revolt

28. *ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 393.

29. *ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 392.

30. For the slave trade to these countries, *vide* Raynaud, Vol. II, pp. 555-63.

31. Hitti, p. 117.

under the leadership of a person called the 'Lord of the Blacks'. Not long afterwards, in 869, when the rebel Persian adventurer, Al Kabith, summoned them to freedom, they are reported to have flocked in tens of thousands to his side. In 871 he led them to capture and sack Basra and with their help dominated the Euphrates delta for fourteen years. So deep a mark was left by his regime that when Al Masudi visited the country forty years later he was told by everyone, doubtless with exaggeration, that the chief of the black slaves had caused the death, by famine or the sword, of at least a million people.³²

During the tenth century the Arab scholar, Ibn Hawqal, writing in 976-7, reported that Abul Jaish Ibn Ziyad, the king of the Yaman, received slaves, as well as amber and leopard skins, from the ruler of the Dahlak islands and other gifts from a queen ruling the Habash.³³ Abu Mohamed Umara states that these slaves numbered a thousand, half of whom were Abyssinian and Nubian women. In 985 Al Maqdisi listed slaves from Abyssinia among the principal merchandise of Aden.³⁴ Over a century later, in 1021, an Ethiopian slave called Najah, who had been purchased in Africa by the ruler of the Yaman, obtained power at Zabid in the Yaman and established a dynasty, the Banu Najah, which ruled until 1159. At the beginning of this period there were at least five thousand Abyssinian spearmen at Zabid; later one of the kings of this dynasty, Said Ibn Najah, sent across the Red Sea to purchase a further twenty thousand.³⁵ Spencer Trimingham says that the Banu Najah and the preceding dynasty, the Banu Ziyad, were so active in the slave trade that they made 'many regions of Arabia ethnically similar to the Hamites of the opposite coast'.³⁶ Al Idrisi, writing before 1154, mentioned Zeila as one of the chief centres for the export of Abyssinian slaves, many of whom were taken to the great Yamani slave depot at Zabid.³⁷

Female slaves from Habash were also highly prized throughout Arabia, though opinions about them naturally differed from person to person. One of the few Arabs to lift the veil surround-

32. Stigand, p. 6; Coupland, p. 32.

33. Probably a reference to Yodit.

34. Ranking, p. 148; Maqdisi, p. 97.

35. Kay, pp. 83, 87, 92.

36. Trimingham, p. 61.

37. Dozy and de Goeje, pp. 29-30; Kay, p. 8; Trimingham, p. 61.

ing harem life and to express a critical view on Abyssinian female slaves was Ibn Sultan (*d.* 1063), whose comments on the matter reveal the keen scrutiny to which slaves of different races were subjected. He observed that the female slave from Habash was normally 'weak and flabby and frequently suffered from consumption', but that though she was 'ill-suited for song and dance and languished in a foreign country', she was nevertheless 'reliable and had a strong character in a feeble body'. For his part he preferred Turkish women, who were 'full of grace and animation' and had 'enticing eyes', or the women of Nubia, whom he considered 'the most adaptable and cheerful'.³⁸

Ludovico di Varthema, writing over half a millennium later, tells essentially the same story of large-scale importation of Ethiopian slaves into Arabia. He states that the Sultan of Ormuz had brought up two slaves, the sons of Christians from the land of Prester John, whom he had purchased when quite young and loved like his own children,³⁹ while the Sultan of Sana had no fewer than 'three thousand horsemen, sons of Christians, as black as Moors', from the country of Prester John. They had been purchased at the age of eight or nine years and had been trained to arms. They served as his personal guards and were considered worth more than all the rest of his eighty thousand troops.⁴⁰ Barbosa, writing at about the same time, confirms that the Christians of Abyssinia were 'held in great esteem among the Moors' and says that they were 'worth much more among them than any other slaves', for they were 'skilful and faithful and fine men in their persons'. He added that as soon as they were taken by the Moors they were made to abandon the faith of their forefathers and embrace Islam.⁴¹

Slave troops were also employed in considerable numbers in Egypt and Syria. Thus it is related that after 946 the two sons who succeeded Mohamed Al Ikhshid as rulers of the two territories had only nominal power, as effective control rested in the hands of an Ethiopian eunuch, Abu Al Misk Kafur (musky camphor). Originally purchased by Al Ikhshid from an oil merchant for eighteen dinars or the equivalent of about eight pounds, Kafur became officially the sole ruler from 966 to 968.

38. Von Grunebaum, pp. 210-21.

39. Varthema, p. 96.

40. *ibid.*, p. 64.

41. Barbosa, pp. 35-8.

He successfully defended Egypt and Syria against the rising power of the Hamdanid dynasty of northern Syria, as a result of which his name was immortalized in the verse of Al Mutanabbi, the panegyrist of his adversary, Sayd Al Dawlah Al Hamdani. As Hitti observes, this was 'the first but not the last case of a slave from Africa rising from the humblest origin to wield absolute power'.⁴²

Ethiopian slaves were taken even farther afield. Thus the Venetian traveller, Niccolo Manucci, noted in 1653 that he saw a number of 'Abyssinian slaves' at Brusca, two hundred and forty miles north-east of Smyrna in Anatolia.⁴³ Ethiopian Christians were also employed by the Russian tsars as guards in the Malachite Hall of the Imperial Palace in St. Petersburg from the time of the Empress Elizabeth Petrovna (1740-1760) until the revolution of 1917.⁴⁴

India, as will be seen in Appendix E, also received its quota of slaves from the Horn of Africa, who were usually referred to in the sub-continent as 'Hapshis' or people of Abyssinia. The first to obtain prominence was Jalal-ud-din Yaqut, the favourite of Queen Raziya of Delhi (1236-1240). A century later Ibn Battuta reported that there were about five hundred Abyssinian slave troops in the Ceylonese town of Colombo, that two of the ships on which he travelled carried Ethiopian guards, in one case as many as fifty strong, and that the governor of Alabur, in north India, was an Abyssinian called Badr. During the fifteenth century the number of such slaves in India increased considerably, particularly in the Bengal area of eastern India where King Rukn-ud-din Barbak Shah (1460-1481) is said to have possessed as many as eight thousand, some of whom he appointed to high office. Slave officers rapidly rose to positions of great power and influence in the State. In 1486 a eunuch usurped the throne under the name of Barbak Shah Sultan Shahzada, only to be replaced by another 'Hapshi', Indil Khan, who assumed the title of Saif-ud-din Firuz. After his death in 1489 power shifted into the hands of another Abyssinian slave, Habesh Khan, who was subsequently ousted by yet another Hapshi, Sidi Badr, 'the madman'. This ruler, who is believed

42. Bakhsh, p. 157; Hitti, p. 456.

43. Manucci, Vol. I, p. 11.

44. Jesman, p. 34 and n; Mossolov, pp. 188, 196.

to have had five thousand Abyssinians in his army, was the last of the Hapshi kings of Bengal, for when he died in 1493 his successor, an Arab by descent, immediately banished the entire African contingent which he considered a threat to his position.

The Hapshis, who had been imported into the Deccan in south-west India during the reign of Mujahid Shah (1373-1377), were meanwhile engaged in an even more desperate struggle for power. This continued with scarcely an interruption from 1422, when their allegiance settled the matter of the succession, till the triumph of the Mughuls in 1597. Ethiopian slave troops won such military distinction in this and other parts of India that the Portuguese traveller, De Castro, observed in the middle of the sixteenth century that it had become proverbial throughout the sub-continent that 'a good soldier must be an Abyssinian'.⁴⁵

Early in the following century a notable Hapshi, called Malik Ambar (1549-1626) achieved considerable importance by organizing the resistance against the Mughuls of the kingdom of Ahmadnagar and became the principal man of state, holding the nominal king a virtual prisoner and serving the country with courage, ability and devotion. He was so successful in arms that there were many panegyrics containing the words 'Ambar was victorious'. However, he was not impressed by such flattery. 'Where is the point?' he commented; 'even a child knows that Ambar was victorious.'⁴⁶ His greatness was nevertheless immortalized by many poets, one of whom, recalling the prophet's Ethiopian *muezzin*, Bilal, declared: 'There was Bilal, the servant of the Apostle of God. After a thousand years there came Malik Ambar.'⁴⁷

Hapshi influence in India continued for many a decade. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* notes that the state of Janjira in the Bombay area is still popularly known as Habsan, or Abyssinian, and that the newabs of that state and of Sachin are both Hapshis. The situation, however, is by now somewhat confused, for the newab of Sachin in a letter to the present author, claims to be an Arab of Moroccan descent.

Though many Hapshis rose to positions of fame in the service of the Indian princes, the lot of others was often less exalted.

45. Kammerer, *Le Routier de Dom Joam de Castro*, p. 60.

46. Samsamu-d-Daula Nawaz Khan, Vol. II, p. 12.

47. *ibid.*, Vol., p. 532.

Jan Huygen van Linschoten of Utrecht (1563-1611), for example, saw many Christian and Muslim 'Abyssinians' in Goa and other parts of India. He says they were frequently employed as sailors, and even if not slaves served for very low wages: they were often beaten 'not as slaves, but like dogs'. The Portuguese had a bad reputation as slave owners. Thus the traveller, Jean Mocquet, describing the tragic life of slaves of various races in Portuguese India, states: 'As for the slaves, it is pitiful what cruel chastisements they give them, making them suffer a thousand kinds of torment. For they put them in double sets of irons, and then beat them, not with twenty or thirty blows of a staff, but with as many as five hundred. . . . The master, a Portuguese or half-caste, standing by, and counting the strokes on his rosary.

'While I was lodging at Goa, I heard nothing but blows all night long, and some weak voice which could hardly sigh; for they stuff their mouths with linen cloth, to keep them from crying aloud, and scarce allow them to breathe. After they have well beaten them in this sort, they slash their bodies with a razor, then rub them with salt and vinegar, lest they should mortify.

'One woman had a slave who was not alert enough, nor prompt to rise when summoned; her half-caste mistress caused a horse-shoe to be nailed to her back, so that the poor creature died some time after. . . . Another, for not being wide enough awake, had her eyelids sewn to her brows. . . . Another there was, who was hanged up in a room by the hands for two or three days together, and that for a very small matter, to wit for having let spill a pint of milk. . . . The master of the lodging, having one day bought a Japanese slave girl, chanced, while conversing with his wife, to remark that the girl had very white teeth. The woman said nothing then, but biding her time until her husband was out of doors, she caused this poor slave to be seized and bound, and all her teeth to be torn out, without compassion.'⁴⁸

'The Portuguese', comments Professor Coupland, 'were the first to trade in slaves in West Africa: they were second in East Africa only because the Arabs were before them. Like the Arabs, they not only stole or purchased Africans for their own service, but also exported them overseas. But this European export of

48. Jayne, pp. 22-3; Mocquet, pp. 259-63.

slaves from East Africa was not comparable in volume or duration with the Arab; it was indeed an adjunct of the latter, for it was mainly from Arab or Afro-Arab slave-hunters that the Portuguese dealers obtained their supplies.⁴⁹

The greater part of the East African slaves in Portuguese hands were in fact shipped to India, and only a fraction of them ever reached Portugal which was mainly supplied from West Africa. Such slaves began to arrive during the lifetime of Prince Henry the Navigator (1394-1460). Accurate figures for their importation are not available, but by the middle of the reign of João III (1521-1557) foreigners were commenting on the number to be seen in Lisbon, and by 1550 Africans made up approximately 10 per cent of that city's population. In rural Portugal slaves performed a large part of the agricultural work by the latter half of the sixteenth century.⁵⁰

There is ample evidence to indicate that at an early date large numbers of slaves were also imported into China from the East African coast. They were referred to by many names, among them *kuei-nu* or 'devil slaves', *yeh-jen* or 'wild men', *hei-hsiao-ssu* or 'black servants', *fan-hsiao-ssu* or 'barbarian servants', and *fan-nu* or 'barbarian slaves'. The word *seng-chih-nu* was also employed; it was, according to Duyvendak, derived from *tseng-chi*, a transcription of *zanggi*, the Arabic word for Negroes. Many of the earliest references to slaves in Chinese literature doubtless alluded to slaves from Malaya, but there is clear documentation to show that the later slaves were largely from Africa. It also appears that at least some intermarriage with the Chinese occurred. The *Toung Pao* describes the priest Tao-an (314-385) as *kun-lun-tzu*, or *chi-tao-jen*, 'the black or lacquered monk'; apparently he was much darker than the other northern Chinese. Similarly the later consort of Emperor Chien-wen (371-372) of the Chin dynasty, was so dark that she was given the nickname '*Kun-lun*' by members of the court. The *Ling-wai-tai-ta*, which was written in 1178, confirms that the practice of keeping slaves was fairly widespread; it states: 'The people of Chan-cheng (Champa) buy male and female slaves; and the ships carry human beings as cargo.' Chau Ju-Kua, the trade

49. Coupland, p. 34.

50. Nowell, p. 106. For the slave trade to Egypt, the Middle East and elsewhere, *vide* also Raynaud, Vol. II, pp. 555-63.

commissioner, adds that a boy was priced at three *taels*⁵¹ of gold or the equivalent in aromatic wood.⁵²

In the *Ping-chou-ko-tan*, which appeared in 1119, we have a detailed and frank account of the slaves and how they were regarded by the Chinese master-race: 'In Kuang-chou most of the wealthy people keep devil-slaves. They are very strong and can lift (weights of) several hundred *catties*. Their language and tastes are unintelligible. Their nature is simple and they do not run away. They are also called "wild men". Their colour is black as ink, their lips are red and their teeth white, their hair is curly and yellow(?). There are males and females (N.B.: the term for animals is used). They live in the mountains (or islands) beyond the seas. They eat raw things. If, in captivity, they are fed on cooked food, after several days they get diarrhoea. This is called "changing the bowels". For this reason they sometimes fall ill and die; if they do not die one can keep them, and after having been kept a long time they begin to understand people's language (i.e. Chinese), although they themselves cannot speak it. There is one kind of wild men near the sea who can enter the water without blinking their eyes. They are called "*Kun-lun* slaves".'⁵³

It is impossible to estimate the extent of the slave trade from the Horn of Africa during the period covered by the present volume though it was obviously immense. Coupland, discussing the question of the East African slave trade in general terms, concludes: 'In Turkey and Arabia and Persia they became a large and permanent element in the population. No figures are available till relatively recent times, but in 1835 the slaves in Oman constituted no less than a third of the population, and there is no reason to suppose that some such proportion had not been established long before.' The African slave, he adds, was 'a familiar figure in Arabic literature; and the eunuch observed by Ibn Battuta in the Sheikh's palace at Mogadishu had a hundred counterparts in the Bagdad of the Arabian Nights'.⁵⁴

'Exact calculation', he admits, 'is impossible; but it has been estimated on the basis of trustworthy statistics available for certain years that the European Slave Trade in the Atlantic was

51. A unit of weight which varied considerably but was often the equivalent of 575·8 grains.

52. Duyvendak, p. 23.

53. Presumably pearl divers.

54. Coupland, pp. 31-2.

responsible for the removal from Africa of at least twelve million Africans; and certainly a great many more, perhaps an equal or even higher number, perished in the process. Now the European Slave Trade did not begin till the sixteenth century, it did not reach its full volume till the eighteenth, and in the course of the nineteenth it was suppressed. But the Arab Slave Trade began before the Christian Era and it did not stop till some fifty years ago (i.e. in the eighteen eighties), and though its output in any single year can never have reached the highest figures of the European trade, the total number of Africans it exported from first to last through all those centuries must have been prodigious.' Writing with special reference to the southern part of East Africa he concludes that the major reason for its small population appeared to be 'the steadily continued abduction and destruction of the people, men, women and children, by the Slave Trade over a period of at least two thousand years'.⁵⁵

There is strong evidence to suppose that the above remarks hold good also for the Horn of Africa. Careful scrutiny of the relatively more abundant data given by travellers in the early nineteenth century suggests that there may then have been an annual export of something like 25,000 slaves via Massawa, the Somali ports and the Sudan. This would suggest that something like two and a half million persons were carried away from their native lands in a century, undoubtedly a very heavy drain on a population which at the end of our period was perhaps in the region of ten million. A significant proportion of the country's man-power thus found its way to other lands and Ethiopian blood intermingled richly with that of other nations.⁵⁶

55. *ibid.*, pp. 34-5.

56. *Vide Johnston, passim; Harris, passim.*

Conclusion

THE texture of Ethiopian life in the centuries covered in this volume may be said to have been woven from the warp and weft of continuity and change. Though at first sight the observer might be overawed by the apparently permanent and unchanging character of the country's economic and social institutions, more careful analysis indicates that the elements out of which history is made were not lacking.

The Aksumite empire, whose greatness will ever be venerated in Ethiopian history, was no mere transplantation of a South Arabian civilization on to African soil. It was a new and unique civilization which, to judge from archaeological evidence, rose from modest beginnings to a high level of attainment. It displayed a general character of invention never equalled nor surpassed in subsequent Ethiopian history. In this period there were notable achievements: the construction of well-proportioned buildings of various kinds out of excellently cut and closely fitting stone, as well as the fashioning and erection of the famous monoliths which have caused innumerable subsequent generations to marvel at the genius of the past; the evolution of a new script and language; the issue of a currency for hundreds of years. The Aksumite empire won for itself a significant position in the Middle East, receiving diplomatic attention from the rulers of the Eastern Roman Empire and for a time occupying parts of South Arabia. Commercial relations were forged with many areas of the Orient, including Egypt, Nubia, Arabia, Persia and India, while Aksumite ships, built on the African coast of the Red Sea, are said to have sailed as far as Ceylon. It was not without significance that the Aksumites quickly came to terms in one way or another with four of the world's major religions, Judaism, Hellenism, Christianity and Islam.

The comparative paucity of descriptive accounts relating to Aksumite and early post-Aksumite times renders our knowledge of the civilization of this time incomplete and one-sided. Though

relatively much may be written of foreign relations, political, religious and commercial, we have no contemporary accounts of how the people in fact lived at that time. This hiatus is the more serious in that it renders it impossible for the historian to date or adequately to comprehend the development of many of the institutions and phenomena, traditions and customs, which may be discerned as already well established by the Middle Ages. Inability to witness the preceding important formative period tends inevitably to cause the student to over-emphasize the static aspect at the expense of the dynamic.

The Aksumite conversion to Christianity, followed three centuries later by the rise of Islam, and that religion's rejuvenation of the peoples of Arabia, seem to have resulted in a considerable transformation which was intensified by later events, including the eruption of the Zagwe. Ethiopian civilization, which had been slowly expanding into the Horn of Africa, seems to have become more and more land-locked, self-sufficient and relatively uninterested in trade. Not only had the Aksumite conquests in South Arabia long been lost, but the best ports were in foreign hands and the trade routes were threatened. No more coins were struck. It was of this period after the rise of Islam that Gibbon wrote, albeit with exaggeration: 'Encompassed by the enemies of their religion, the Aethiopians slept near a thousand years, forgetful of the world by whom they were forgotten.' This often quoted sentence may perhaps best be described as a half-truth. It ignores the fact that the near-millennium under discussion embraced both the Zagwe dynasty and the Solomonic restoration. The former witnessed the construction of the famous monolithic churches at Lalibela, which have been referred to as one of the Wonders of the World. The latter was also a period of cultural importance, particularly in the field of literature and, according to the traditional account, was the time when the clergy's ownership of the land was vastly extended as a result of Abuna Takla Haymanot's influence in the restoration of the Solomonic line. The innumerable wars occurring throughout the whole period which Gibbon attributes to sleep also render his words somewhat misleading. His comment is nonetheless by no means a wholly inept commentary on the isolationist tendencies of the times.

The Ethiopian empire of the Middle Ages was a basically

rural civilization covering a very extensive area of the plateau which was at least nominally subject to the Emperors. The latter, whose authority received strong support in the *Fetha Nagast*, wielded immense power over persons and property alike, were highly revered by their subjects, and were able to move far and wide at the head of huge armies. A fairly well-developed social hierarchy existed, composed of nobles, priests, peasants, and slaves, as well as traders and craftsmen, the two latter being often clearly differentiated from the rest of the population on the basis of either religion or taboo.

The existence of this relatively large social hierarchy, the agricultural character of the economy, and the absence of a market mechanism, necessitated a system of taxation very largely based on the payment of tribute in kind or labour, as well as a type of land tenure in which the sovereign allocated the land to many of his subjects in return for services rendered by them in peace or war. Other types of tenure were also operative, land in many areas being firmly vested in the community.

Economic life tended to be self-sufficient whether regarded from the point of view of the empire, the province, the village, or even the individual household which itself produced most of the goods it might require. Geographically, the mountainous nature of the land and the existence of several large rivers and numerous torrent-beds, which were of no use for navigation but constituted a formidable obstacle to land traffic, seriously discouraged communications between one area and another. This tendency was intensified by historic factors, such as the hostile control of the coast, the high degree of local autonomy in many of the provinces, and the consequent system of internal customs posts, as well as by the dangers of war and brigandage. The absence of a system of currency and the consequent reliance on the *amole*, or salt bar, and other forms of 'primitive money' of varying inconvenience also militated against the best interests of commerce.

Trade was regarded as an inferior pursuit by the majority of the Christian population of the plateau. It was largely in the hands of Muslims, who often received preferential treatment at Massawa, as well as in Arabia, Egypt and the Sudan, the main area of commerce, where a knowledge of Arabic moreover stood them in good stead. The tendency for the Muslims to be traders

was further accentuated by the fact that in the mainly Christian areas of the plateau it was difficult for them to obtain advancement in either government service or the army or to hold land under systems of tenure related to such occupations. Other traders included various foreigners, such as Egyptians, Syrians, Arabs, Armenians and Greeks, most of whom were subjects of the Ottoman empire and hence privileged when travelling through lands belonging to that empire. It was customary for the Emperors of Ethiopia to employ persons of these races as their trade agents rather than their own people who had no feeling for commerce.

Social mobility was rigidly circumscribed by tradition. Christianity, which was conceived of as a religion with a place for all men, prevented the emergence of anything approaching the caste system of Hindu India, and even preached the desirability of slave-owners emancipating their slaves, if converted, on the basis of individual charity. Blacksmiths, silversmiths, potters and other manual workers, many of whom in certain areas were Falashas, or Jews, were nonetheless regarded as a community apart. Popular superstition held that such persons were sorcerers who turned into hyenas at night and caused people to fall ill. Persecution of such craftsmen was unfortunately only too common, and the segregation of the three main religious communities, Christian, Muslim, and Falasha, though by no means fully effected, was twice proclaimed by the Emperor Yohannes I.

Traditionally there was little realization of either the need or the possibility of improvement in the economic field. The kindness of the climate and the fertility of the soil, which allowed of abundant harvests, engendered an attitude of complacency. Occasional crop failures and famines were dismissed as arising from divine displeasure and therefore failed to operate as catalysts of change. The relative isolation of the empire, as well as of its various provinces, similarly minimized the opportunity of external influence. Contact with foreigners was slight; few Ethiopians travelled abroad even for purposes of pilgrimage, and the only attempt at sending students abroad for study collapsed when the seven young persons whom the Emperor Iyasu I had selected to be sent to the Court of King Louis XIV of France were seized as slaves by the Pasha of Jeddah. Until the Industrial

Revolution, furthermore, the technical superiority of Europe, though already evident, was not so overwhelming that it could not be ignored by a proud and patriotic yet in many ways conservative people.

As in many other countries, moreover, economic considerations tended to be ignored or despised by the élite as being either not worthy of attention at all or merely the concern of the lower orders. The fact that a very substantial part of production was undertaken by slaves, who were employed to undertake menial tasks in the home, by villeins, equally persons of low status, who worked much of the land, and by isolated castes of craftsmen, such as blacksmiths and potters, who were regarded at best with deep misgiving and at worst with open hostility, influenced the general attitude to work.

Most of the sovereigns, as suggested both by their chronicles and by foreign observers, devoted their attention very largely to the prosecution of war, as well as sometimes to religious disputes. Items of economic development and innovation, when mentioned at all, were treated as of secondary importance, sometimes even as mere matters of curiosity. One of the chroniclers, for instance, devotes space to the arrival of a parrot who was said to be able to speak in several languages.¹ The chronicles of the period under discussion have much to say about the valour of their masters, but it is not until the middle of the nineteenth century that we find record of an Emperor, Theodore II, expressing the Biblical desire of beating swords into ploughshares and spears into pruning hooks. Equally significant, though the Emperor Takla Haymanot I was but the last of a number of rulers mentioned in this volume to conceive of dam building on the Nile, he contemplated it, like his predecessors, 'to do harm' to the Egyptians: only in the twentieth century did the Emperor Menelik II and more recently the Emperor Haile Sellassie I, envisage it as an item of economic development.

The nobility, as was only to be expected, shared the contemporary attitude, and appear to have displayed a paternalistic approach towards the peasants who supplied them with produce and labour. It may be recalled that a seventeenth-century provincial governor, Takla Giyorgis, dismissed a complaint that his villeins were suffering from too heavy a burden of taxation with

1. Bruce, Vol. II, p. 343.

the remark that they 'are like camels' they cry and groan when they are loaded, but in the end they carry the load that is put on them'.

The clergy, who provided the only system of education in the land, were very numerous and included a small proportion of highly sophisticated persons as well as a number of pilgrims who had returned from the Holy Land. At an intellectual level they were mainly concerned with problems of another world, and played no role in economic innovation.

Finally, the peasants, who constituted the least educated section of the community, seem to have adopted an almost entirely fatalistic approach to the problems of their life, and, according to one recent study, were profoundly unconscious of historical change.²

For all these reasons the tempo of change was slow. The greater flexibility in the economy was to be discerned in the military sector which deserves the closest attention.³ This was a field in which even a slight improvement in technique could be of decisive importance. As early as the reign of Emperor Yeshaq I it was found desirable to employ Mamelukes from Egypt in the manufacture of weapons. The need for innovation was vastly increased after the introduction of firearms in the early sixteenth century, and especially after their utilization by the armies of Ahmad Grañ whose success in arms must largely be explained in ballistic terms. Innovation in the military field thereafter came to be regarded by the sovereigns, very rightly, as no less than a matter of life and death and the corner-stone of foreign policy; it stimulated a desire for foreign craftsmen who could handle or repair weapons as well as for foreign allies who could supply them. The desire for change did not, however, extend to any substantial reorganization of the army which continued to be based on the old traditional system; inferior served superior almost invariably on an unpaid basis as part of the established social order.

Another field of experimentation, curiously enough, was fruit cultivation. A certain, though limited, interest in the introduction and planting of fruit trees may be discerned on the part of several of the sovereigns. The Emperor Baeda Maryam planted

2. *Vide Levine, passim.*

3. *Vide Pankhurst, The Independence of Ethiopia, passim.*

citrons, grapes and bananas; the Emperor Susneyos is said to have planted five thousand vines, and to have introduced the papaya from India; oranges and lemons were planted by the Emperor Iyasu II at his palace at Azazo. Such projects were exotic or decorative rather than economic, and were not in the main extensive; they were therefore not of great importance. It is indeed significant that fruit does not seem to have entered into the popular diet to any great extent, and that wine made from grapes was a rarity, except possibly at Gondar.

Bridge building, though also limited in extent, was perhaps a more important field of innovation. It owed much to the discovery of a way of making mortar from local stones which is attributed to an artisan from India imported by the Portuguese during the reign of Susneyos. The first bridge, built in the 1620's by an Indian called Abd el Kerim, was followed by a number of others erected after the founding of Gondar in the reign of Fasiladas. Such bridges, however, were restricted to the Gondar-Lake Tana-Blue Nile area, and were probably no longer made after the death of the king. They are therefore of somewhat limited relevance in the broad sweep of Ethiopian history upon which the difficulties of communication left a firm imprint.

Despite the remarkable efforts of a succession of Emperors to attract foreigners to the country and the influx of a not insignificant band of Europeans, Arabs and Indians who arrived in quest of riches, military glory or the conversion of the inhabitants, the impact of foreigners seems to have been relatively slight. This may be attributed partly to the fact that they were too few in number to have much contact with the population at large or to achieve any momentum of change, and partly to the attitudes of mind of all concerned. The Emperors, who were not essentially interested in technology outside the military sector, were in many cases only desirous of acquiring a handful of foreigners to undertake such necessary skilled work as was unknown to their own subjects, and did not envisage any system of training to enable their own people to acquire what were virtually regarded as foreign habits. The population at large, being largely self-sufficient and assured of the basic necessities of life, tended to be conservative and saw little need for adopting new ideas. Foreigners who came to the country to engage in skilled work preferred to keep their knowledge a mystery so as to be assured

a monopolistic position without competitors from among the people of the land. A few, like the early Portuguese Roman Catholics against whom the Emperor Galawdewos wrote his *Confession of Faith*, the Jesuits, who went so far towards converting the country, and the Lutheran Peter Heiling, who arrived in Gondar immediately after the establishment of the city, were truly interested in influencing the people, but almost exclusively in religious rather than in secular things. The Roman Catholics in particular devoted much enthusiasm to proving the superiority of their own Church over that which had been established in the country so long before, urging, for example, that only Sunday, not Saturday as well, should be celebrated as the Sabbath; that the dietary rules of Moses were out of date and that priests should not be allowed to marry. Peter Heiling, who arrived immediately after the expulsion of the Jesuits when foreigners and their attempts to influence the people were in disfavour, confined himself, according to Ludolphus, to the practice of medicine and to the teaching of Hebrew and Greek. Both languages, it may be suggested, were of limited value to a country then largely suffering from linguistic isolation from Arabic-speaking areas of the Middle East, as well as from the major countries of Europe where Greek and Hebrew were understood only by scholars. We find no reference in the literature to any effort by foreigners to teach or popularize new techniques in agriculture or animal husbandry, industry or housing, no word of any attempt to encourage tree preservation or afforestation, or to introduce a system of currency in place of the inconvenient salt bar. Such topics were doubtless considered mundane. Though the Jesuit Pero Pais must be honoured as a builder, his efforts in this field were confined to the erection of a palace and churches, as well as to buildings for his fellow missionaries, and did not extend to the dwellings of the ordinary people, while his predecessor, Melchior da Silva, is said to have been content to dwell in the house of an ordinary Ethiopian peasant. His colleague, Almeida, informs us that the Portuguese had brought the Emperor Susneyos a gilt bed from far-off China; though the latter was happy to sleep on it, the bed of the ordinary Ethiopian remained unchanged. In some ways traditional Ethiopia resembled an ethnological museum, the exhibits of which were preserved from century to century; some of them,

such as the plough, the grinding stone and the neck-rest being indeed remarkably similar to those used in ancient Egypt.⁴

Throughout this period innovation, when attempted, seems to have fallen on stony ground. The protection afforded by the Emperor Baeda Maryam to the painter Brancalone, who violated the tradition of the land and aroused the hostility of the priests by depicting the Virgin holding the Christchild in her left arm instead of the right, is not wholly a proof to the contrary. That the opposition to the painting was manifested at all is no less significant than the actual outcome of the incident. The innovation, moreover, was not in any case of material importance to the civilization, and despite the sovereign's benevolence, was not in fact adopted; Ethiopian painters continued to place the child on the right as their forefathers had done before them. For good or ill the Ethiopian people remained steadfast in their traditions.

Change in the economic field, though often prompted by military or strategic considerations, was by no means easy to achieve. This may be illustrated in the sphere of transport and communications. During the war with Grañ, for example, the Portuguese army of intervention not only imported a number of cannon on wheels, but saw the advantage of, and consequently constructed, sledges to transport their artillery. Such inventions, however, made no impact on traditional Ethiopian civilization. No carts whatsoever were used – doubtless in part for reasons of geography – and the age-old reign of the mule, the donkey, and the human porter, was not disturbed.

The story of innovations in boat building is not dissimilar. During the wars with Grañ the Emperor Lebna Dengel used Europeans to construct boats on the Hawash to enable his army to cross the river, but there is no evidence of the manufacture of such vessels being continued even though the example had been set. Grañ likewise obtained the services of Arabs to produce large dug-out canoes for the seizure of islands on Lake Tana, but this type of boat was not perpetuated. Later attempts at boat building on this lake were no more successful. During the reign of Susneyos two vessels of timber were constructed, one by an Ethiopian ecclesiastic, and the other by the Portuguese, but

4. Mérab, *Impressions d'Ethiopie*, Vol. III, pp. 284, 373, 379, 387, 422, 437; Huntingford, p. 108.

neither was extensively used, let alone copied. The same may be said of the sailing boat later made for the Emperor Bakaffa by two Greeks. Though this last-mentioned vessel earned itself a score or so lines in the chronicle of the reign, the *tankwa*, the traditional boat made of reeds from the shore of the lake, continued to ply its course, without a competitor, as it had done from time immemorial.

The static nature of the Ethiopian economy during the Middle Ages and after may be seen from descriptions of foreign travellers, as well as from paintings by the artists of the country; they indicate the remarkable manner in which phenomena already well established in the sixteenth century were perpetuated into recent or even present times. There was in fact little sign of change in the manner of ploughing, sowing, reaping or threshing, the way of grinding corn or the preparation of food, the mode of spinning, weaving or the fashioning of clothes, or the method of house-building.

It would be grossly incorrect, however, to assume that the period under discussion was one of slumber in which no change occurred. On the contrary, there were important developments in many fields, not to speak of the innumerable wars, the most serious of which, that of Ahmad Grañ, constitutes a great dividing line in Ethiopian history. During the seventeenth century, in particular, the empire's frontiers contracted greatly, and there was almost certainly a very substantial decline in revenue. Access to the sea also steadily deteriorated, notably after the seizure of Massawa by the Turks in 1557.

The later sixteenth century saw the advent on the stage of the Gallas, a very numerous people concerning whom there was hitherto no documentation. In their northward advance they overran large areas until then subject to the Emperors, and inaugurated an era of conflict which cut traditional trade routes and partly superseded generations of war between the Christians of the plateau and the Muslims of Adal. It is said that the Gallas underwent significant changes in their way of life during the presidency of their *luba* Mesle when they adopted the use of horses, though this assertion rests in fact on the evidence of only one source, the monk Bahrey who, of course, may not have been adequately informed. An important subsequent development can be seen by comparing the writings of the Portuguese, who depict

the Gallas as a purely pastoral people, with the *Travels* of James Bruce who reveals that by the later eighteenth century many of them were cultivating the land and had acquired the use of the plough from their northern neighbours.⁵ By the later seventeenth century the end of the Galla migration had resulted in a decline in armed conflict, and, towards the end of our period, Gallas played a decisive role in Gondar politics. Unfortunately lack of contemporary documentation renders it impossible to review the economic and social life of this people, whose history seems to have been characterized by immense changes, in any detail. The sources available for this period mainly cover the northern provinces often referred to as traditional Ethiopia, and necessitate the ignoring of many distinct cultures.

Vast changes occurred in our period in the political field. The power of the Emperor, which had been given scriptural basis in the *Fetha Nagast* and had caused the chronicler of Zara Yaqob to relate that 'everyone' trembled before the King, gradually declined in the Gondar epoch until the Emperors became mere puppets of important Rases. The resumption of Imperial power did not take place until after the middle of the nineteenth century.

A number of attempts were made in this period to abandon the tradition of a moving capital, a tradition which in the words of the chronicle of Galawdewos caused the ruler to move from camp to camp until his last resting place. The establishment of Gondar represented the most important reversion to older habits. The growth of the city was accompanied by important developments besides the erection of the famous castles which so forcibly arrest the attention of the visitor to the city. Mention has already been made of the innovation of bridge building undertaken by the Emperor Fasiladas, which greatly assisted communications. The Emperor Iyasu I introduced a new system of land tenure in the vicinity of the city based on a threefold division of the land among the original proprietors, the army and the church. This innovation overcame the difficulty of providing for the soldiers which had hitherto obliged them to forage for themselves at the expense of the peasants, an operation which had intensified the shortage of supplies from which earlier capitals are supposed to have suffered.

5. Almeida, p. 136; Bruce, Vol. II, p. 217.

The position of church land seems to have been by no means stable in the centuries covered by this volume. Tradition holds that extensive ownership of land by churches, monasteries and ecclesiastics owed much to the thirteenth-century settlement bringing an end to the Zagwe dynasty in which the ecclesiastic, Takla Haymanot, who negotiated it, arranged for the church to be given what was said to be a third of the kingdom. Reductions in church land are believed to have been effected by the subsequent Emperor Theodore I, as well as by the Emperor Susneyos whose action in this respect may have had interesting repercussions on the religious conflicts of his reign. The church's right to a third of the land was nevertheless subsequently recognized, as we have seen, by the Emperor Iyasu I in allocating estates in the Gondar area.

Notwithstanding such changes the basic continuity of Ethiopian civilization was preserved and passed on from generation to generation. Though the antiquity of this tradition may fill the nationalist with pride, the study of economic and social conditions in former times – the primitive forms of agriculture, industry and trade, the incidence of disease, and the inadequate system of education – must prompt him to reflect that the Golden Age lies not in the Past, but in the Future, and cause him to re-dedicate himself to his country's service.

APPENDIX A

List of Aksumite Kings who issued Coins

KAMMERER and Conti Rossini¹ differ in their analysis of the Aksumite currency as can be seen in the following lists of kings who issued coins :

Kammerer

1. Endybis
2. Aphilas
3. Ousanas (I)
4. Wazeba
5. Ezana
6. Ouazeza
7. Mhygs (Mahygasa?)
8. Bac Cin Bax Aba (???)
9. Esbael or Esbana
10. Kaleb
11. Nezana
12. Ousanas (II)
13. Ousas
14. Anaeb or Ebana (?)
15. Alalmiryis
16. Ella Gabaz
17. Iyoel
18. Israel
19. Iathlia
20. Wazena
21. Armah
22. Hataz (I)
23. Gersem
24. Hataz (II)

Conti Rossini

1. Aphilas
2. Endybis
3. Ousanas
4. Wazeb
5. Ezana
6. Esbael
7. Ousazezas
8. Eon
9. Alalmisiyis (Allamisiyis?)
10. Ousas
11. Kaleb
12. Israel
13. Mhyws or Mhygs
14. Ioel
15. Za Ya'abiyo La-Madhen
16. Anas
17. Ella Gabaz
18. Armah
19. Yathlia
20. Za-Wazan
21. Ghersem
22. Hataz

1. Conti Rossini, 'Monete Aksumite' in *Africa Italiana*, Vol. I, No. 3, 1927.

APPENDIX B

*Analysis of Aksumite Currency*¹

<i>Name of King</i>	<i>Royal Title</i>	<i>Race or Ancestry</i>	<i>Language of Legend</i>	<i>Religion of Kings</i>	<i>Probable Country of Mintage</i>	<i>Period</i>	<i>Observations and Number of Types known</i>
1. Endybis	King of the Aksumites	Of the race of Dachu	Greek	Pagan	Ethiopia	2nd half of 3rd century	Three pieces of gold
2. Aphilas	"	Of the race of Dimele	"	"	"	End of 3rd century, or beginning of 4th	Perhaps the immediate successor of Endybis. 10 pieces of gold, 2 of silver and 3 of bronze
3. Ousanas (I)	"	Of the race of Gissene or Gisses	"	"	"	"	3 pieces of gold and 2 of silver
4. Wazeba	Negus of Aksum	Of the race of Zgly	Ethiopic	"	"	"	1 piece of gold
5. Ezana	King of the Aksumites	Of the race of Alene	Greek	First Pagan, later Christian	Ethiopia for coins of 2 gms., Arabia for those of 1½ gms.	Before and after 330	11 coins bearing the crescent of which 8 were gold, 12 bearing the cross, all of gold
6. Ouazeba	Ouazebas, King	"	"	Christian	Ethiopia	End of 4th century, or 5th	11 pieces of bronze, the majority with the legend 'May it please the people'

1. Kammerer. *La Mer Rouge*, Vol. I, pp. 222-3.

7. Mhygs (Mahegasa?) Aksum	Negus of Aksum	Ethiopic	"	"	Between end of 4th century and beginning of 6th	5 pieces of bronze
8. Bac Cin Bac Aba	King of Sion (?) King of the Habashat (?)	Of the race of Anaa- pheon	"	Arabia	"	The name of the king and the sense of the legend is not established ²
9. Esbael or Esbana	King of Sion (?) King of the Habashat (?)	"	"	"	"	30 pieces very similar to the above, all of gold. <i>Esbael should not be confused with Ellesbas called Kaleb in the money</i>
10. Kaleb	King Son of Thezena	Greek with or without monogram in Ethiopic	"	Arabia (gold) Ethiopia (bronze)	Reigned about 525	25 pieces, of which 23 were of gold and 2 of bronze; 7 pieces of gold bear the monogram in Ethiopic KLB (Kaleb); 2 pieces of bronze bear the legend 'May it please the people'. Period of Ethiopian rule in Arabia
11. Nezana	King of Sion (?) King of the Habashat (?)	Greek	"	Arabia and Ethiopia	6th century	4 pieces of which 3 were of gold and 1 of silver, all of different mintage. One bears the mono- gram in Ethiopic: NZN (Nezana) and the legend 'By the Grace of God'. Period of Ethiopian rule in Arabia
12. Ousanas (II) King	"	"	"	Arabia	"	1 piece of gold with the legend 'By the Grace of God'. Period of Ethiopian rule in Arabia
13. Ousas	"	"	"	"	"	10 pieces of gold with the legend, 'By the Grace of God'. Period of Ethiopian rule in Arabia

2. For a discussion on this coin *vide* Doresse, Vol. I, pp. 278-82.

<i>Name of King</i>	<i>Royal Title</i>	<i>Race or Ancestry</i>	<i>Language of Legend</i>	<i>Religion of Kings</i>	<i>Probable Country of Mintage</i>	<i>Period</i>	<i>Observations and Number of Types known</i>
14. Anaeb or Ebana (?)	King		Greek	Christian	Ethiopia	6th century	3 pieces of silver. Period of Ethiopian rule in Arabia
15. Alalmiryis	King (?)	Of the race of Loei (?)	"	"	"	7th century	1 piece of gold, reading doubtful. Beginning of the decline of the Aksumite empire
16. Ella Gabaz	Negus, King		"	"	"	7th or 8th century	3 pieces of gold
17. Iyoel	King of the Aksumites		Greek or Ethiopic	"	"	"	19 pieces of which 2 are of gold with Greek inscriptions; the others are of bronze with Ethiopic legends, one of which is 'Christ is with us'
18. Israel	"		Greek	"	Ethiopia (Adulis)	"	35 pieces of gold, mainly found at Adulis. The name of the King appears on certain Royal lists. He is given as the second son of Kaleb ruling over Arabia, while his elder brother, Gabra Maskal, succeeded Kaleb in Ethiopia itself.
19. Iathlia	"		"	"	"	"	3 pieces of which 2 are of gold and 1 of silver
20. Wazena	Negus		Ethiopic	"	Ethiopia	"	8 pieces of bronze, with the legend 'Wazena Negus. May it please the people'. Final period of the decline of Aksum. <i>This King must not be confused with Wazeba or Ouazeba</i>

21. Armah	"	"	"	According to Anzani between the 7th and 9th centuries, but most probably about 630	16 pieces of which 1 was of gold and 15 of brass, with the legend 'Armah Negus, happiness and greetings to the people'. This King appears in a certain number of Royal lists
22. Hataz (I)	"	"	"	According to Anzani between the 7th and 11th centuries, but probably about 630	4 pieces of bronze with the title 'Hataz Negus'.
23. Gersem	King of the Aksumites	Greek or Ethiopic	"	8th or 9th century	5 pieces of which 3 are of gold and 2 of bronze. The gold coins (which have Greek inscriptions) bear the legend 'Gersem. King of the Aksumites'. The coins with Ethiopic inscriptions bear the legend, 'Gersem, you will conquer with Christ'. <i>This is the last King to mint gold coins</i>
24. Hataz (II)	Negus	Ethiopic	"	9th or beginning of 10th century	22 pieces of bronze with the legend 'Hataz Negus. May grace be with the people'. These coins have already a medieval character. Hataz was probably one of the last kings before the Zagwe dynasty. This currency is different from that attributed to Hataz (I). In the absence of proof it seems logical to attribute it to a different king

APPENDIX C

Urban Population Estimates 1520-1773

NO POPULATION estimates are available either for Ethiopia as a whole or for any of her provinces in the period covered by this volume. Foreign observers, as we have seen, did no more than hazard population guesses for a handful of the towns and villages they visited, more frequently mentioning only the number of huts or houses they believed them to comprise.

The German naturalist, Eduard Rüppell, who visited Ethiopia early in the nineteenth century, estimated that the typical Ethiopian house was inhabited by six to seven persons. For lack of any better statistical basis the figure 6.5 is therefore used to convert estimates of numbers of houses into numbers of persons and vice versa, the figure thus obtained being placed in brackets.

<i>Name of Place</i>	<i>Number of Houses</i>	<i>Number of Inhabitants</i>	<i>Approximate Date of Estimate</i>	<i>Source of Estimate</i>	<i>page</i>
Adowa . .	300	(1,950)	1770	Bruce III	119
Aksum . .	(15) ¹	100 ¹	1630	Almeida	90
Aksum . .	150-200	(970-1,300)	1630	Beccari II	202
Aksum . .	600	(3,900)	1770	Bruce III	132
Arkiko . .	400	(2,600)	1770	Bruce III	63
Debaroa . .	300	(1,950)	1520	Alvarez	44
Emfras . .	300	(1,950)	1770	Bruce III	386
Gondar . .	Christians 7,000 families	(65,000)	1770	Bruce III	380
(in time of peace)	Muslims 3,000 families				
'Muslim town' nearby . .	1,000	(6,500)	1770	Bruce III	198, 381
Hadawi . .	80	(520)	1770	Bruce III	95
Manadelay . .	(155)	(1,000)	1520	Alvarez	103
Sanacho . .	300	(1,950)	1770	Bruce IV	316
Serke . .	500-600	(3,250-3,900)	1700	Poncet	111
Shire . .	somewhat more than 600	(somewhat more than 3,900)	1770	Bruce III	153

1. Doubtful estimates.

APPENDIX D

Chinese Coins Found in East Africa

CHINESE COINS, as we have seen, have been found in many parts of East Africa. Lieutenant C. S. Smith, British Vice-Consul at Zanzibar, 1883-1886, found at Kilwa one coin of the Shun Hua period (990-995), three of Hsi Ning (1068), and one of Cheng Ho (1111).¹ F. Stuhlmann, discussing Chinese coins found at Kilwa, Kisimani Mafia and Mogadishu, declares that they are mainly of the Sung dynasty (1017-1163), while some are even earlier, of the Tang dynasty (713-1017).² Major F. B. Pearce found a further coin of the Hsi Ning period (1068) at Kilwa, while J. S. Kirkman mentions the discovery at the Arab city of Gedi, on the Kenya coast, of two Chinese coins, one of Ning Tsung (1195-1224) and the other of Shao Ting (1225-1265).³

A much larger hoard of coins was found at Kajengwa, in Zanzibar in 1944; it is believed that a considerable part of it fell into the hands of local inhabitants and was lost to scholarship; one hundred and seventy-six coins, however, found their way to the Beit al-Amani Museum and are classified by Dr. Freeman-Grenville as follows:⁴

<i>Northern Sung:</i>	Kao Tsung (618-627)	.	.	4
	Chen Tsung (998-1023)	.	.	7
	Jen Tsung (1041-1054)	.	.	14
	Ying Tsung (1064-1068)	.	.	3
	Shen Tsung (1068-1086)	.	.	48
	Chen Tsung (1086-1101)	.	.	15
	Hsi Tsung (1101-1119)	.	.	21
<i>Southern Sung:</i>	Kao Tsung (1127-1163)	.	.	9
	Hsiao Tsung (1163-1165)	.	.	5
	Kuang Tsung (1190-1195)	.	.	1
	Ning Tsung (1195-1225)	.	.	14
	Li Tsung (1225-1265)	.	.	19
	Tu Tsung (1265-1275)	.	.	8
	Uncertain	.	.	8

1. Walker, *Some Coins from Kilwa*, p. 225; Schjoth, *passim*.

2. Stuhlmann, p. 860.

3. Walker, *Some New Coins from Kilwa*, p. 61; Kirkman, *The Arab City of Gedi*, p. 149.

4. From information kindly supplied to the author by Dr. Freeman-Grenville.

A further collection of coins found at Mogadishu, Brava and Merca, are classified by the same authority as follows

Northern Sung:

Chen Tsung (998-1023)	. . .	1 coin found at Mogadishu
Shen Tsung (Hsi Ning) (1068-1078)	.	2 coins found at Mogadishu
Shen Tsung (Yuan Feng) (1078-1086)		2 coins found at Mogadishu
		1 coin found at Brava
Che Tsung (Yuan Yu) (1086-1094)	.	3 coins found at Mogadishu
Hsuan Ho (1094-1131)	. . .	2 coins found at Mogadishu

Southern Sung:

Kao Tsung (Shao Hsing) (1131-1163)		1 coin found at Mogadishu
Li Tsung (Shun Yu) (1241-1253)	.	2 coins found at Mogadishu
Li Tsung (Pao Yu) (1253-1259)	.	2 coins found at Mogadishu

Ming:

Cheng Tsung (Yung Lee) (1403-1425)		6 coins found at Mogadishu
------------------------------------	--	----------------------------

Ching:

Shih Tsung (Shun Chih) (1644-1662)		1 coin found at Mogadishu
Wen Tsung (Hsien Feng) (1851-1862)		1 coin found at Mogadishu

Ceylonese:

Queen Lilavati (1197-1200)	. . .	1 coin found at Mogadishu
Parakrama Bahu II	. . .	2 coins found at Mogadishu
Bhuraneka Bahu (1273-1284)	. . .	1 coin found at Mogadishu

Annamese:

Ming-Ming (1820-1840)	. . .	1 coin found at Mogadishu
Shao-Chih (1841-1847)	. . .	1 coin found at Mogadishu
Lise-Le (1848-1882)	. . .	1 coin found at Brava
Wei-Hsin (1907-1916)	. . .	1 coin found at Mogadishu

APPENDIX E

The Habshis of India

ONE OF the results of the slave trade from East Africa was the transportation of considerable numbers of Ethiopians to India where, as we have already seen, some of the rulers employed them extensively as soldiers and palace guards. These men, like other slave troops in ancient times, often emerged as powerful military cliques, who could play a decisive rôle in local politics. Moslemized Africans, referred to in India as 'Habshis', or people of Habash, i.e. Abyssinia, were frequently to be found as generals, administrators and king-makers.¹ Like the Mamalukes of Egypt, these slave troops revealed themselves to be efficient, though often ruthless administrators, capable of holding their own amid the ceaseless intrigues and conspiracies of the sub-continent in medieval times.

Notwithstanding the importance of these slaves, Indian records give us little information on their number or exact place of origin; one has the impression that the term Habshi was not always restricted to Abyssinians or Ethiopians, but was used as a generic term for slaves from any part of the Horn of Africa, probably indeed from the whole of East Africa; the use of the term Habshi suggests, however, that a substantial proportion, perhaps a majority, came from within the confines of present-day Ethiopia. The slaves, it should be noted, were mostly separated from other members of their tribe and thus speedily lost contact with the land of their birth to which, moreover, they had no chance of returning. The Indian chroniclers who described Habshi activities in India appear to have paid scant attention to their African origin or antecedents. Nor is it possible to identify the race or nationality of the Habshis by their names, as on being converted to Islam, they universally adopted or were given Muslim-Arab ones. Regardless of their tribal origins the remarkable rôle of this group of Africans in the political history of India, which is given in outline in this appendix, stands as a reminder of the importance of the slave trade described by Alvares and so many other witnesses.

Delhi

It is early in the thirteenth century that Indian history affords us a first glimpse of one of the Ethiopian slaves rising to some prominence in state affairs. At this period the kingdom of Delhi

1. Majumdar and others, p. 395; Raverty, Vol. II, pp. 1004, 1057-61.
Vide also Pires, pp. 14, 34, 51, 88.

was ruled by Queen Raziya (1236-1240), the daughter of Iltutmish, a Turkish slave who had made himself the master of most of Northern India. The Queen, who was threatened on her accession by the disruption of her father's empire, was said to have shown undue favour to one of the Habshi slaves, Jalal-ud-din-Yaqut, whom she elevated to the post of master of the royal stables, thus offending her father's Turkish nobles who were organized in a close corporation. The Moroccan traveller, Ibn Batuta, who visited various parts of Africa and Asia in the following century, describes her 'fondness' for the slave as 'criminal', though her contemporary, the Moslem historian, Minaj-ud-din, merely states that Jalal-ud-din 'acquired favour in attendance upon the Sultan'. The Persian historian, Firishita (c. 1570-1623), observed that 'a very great degree of familiarity was observed to exist between the Abyssinian and the Queen; so much so, that when she rode he always lifted her on her horse by raising her up under the arms'.² E. Thomas, in his *Chronicles of the Pathan Kings*, comments: 'It was not that a virgin Queen was forbidden to love - she might have indulged in a submissive Prince Consort or revelled almost unchecked in the dark recesses of the Palace Harem, but wayward fancy pointed in a wrong direction, and led her to prefer a person employed about her Court, an Abyssinian moreover, whom the Turkish nobles resented with one accord.'³

The result of her favours to Jalal-ud-din was a growing discontent among the Turks which soon flared into open rebellion; the Queen was repeatedly forced to take the field and although at first successful she was eventually overpowered, whereupon Jalal-ud-din was killed by the envious Turks and Raziya herself was deposed in favour of her half-brother, Muizz-ud-din Bahram.⁴

A century or so later in 1376-7 we find Shams Damaghari, governor of Gujerat, on one occasion paying a tribute of four hundred slaves who are described as 'children of Hindu chiefs and Abyssinians'.⁵

Gwalior, Calicut and Ceylon

Ibn Batuta makes several references to the presence of Ethiopians in India, at the time of his travels in India of 1333-1342. He states that the governor of Alabur (Alapur, a few miles S.E. of Gwalior in Northern India) was an Abyssinian named Badr, a slave of the Rajah of Dholpur. The courage of Badr, he writes, had become

2. Briggs, Vol. I, p. 220.

3. Thomas, p. 106; Habibullah, *passim*.

4. *Cambridge History of India*, Vol. III, p. 60.

5. Basu, p. 139.

proverbial : 'He was continually making raids on the infidels alone and single handed, killing and taking them captive, so that his fame spread far and wide and the infidels went in fear of him. He was tall and corpulent, and used to eat a whole sheep at a meal, and I was told that after eating he would drink about a pound and a half of ghee (clarified butter), following the custom of the Abyssinians in their own country.'⁶ Sailing down the south-west coast of India, Ibn Battuta relates that the ship on which he travelled, the *ḡagir*, 'had a complement of fifty rowers and fifty Abyssinian men-at-arms'. These latter, he added, were 'the guarantors of safety on the Indian Ocean; let there be but one of them on a ship, and it will be avoided by the Indian pirates and idolaters'.⁷ Later, having embarked on a Chinese junk at Calicut in South India, he records that the owner's agent also employed Ethiopian guards; the agent was, we are told, 'like a great emir. When he goes on shore, he is preceded by archers and Abyssinians with javelins, swords, drums, trumpets and bugles. On reaching the house where he stays they stand their lances on both sides of the door, and continue thus during his stay'.⁸ Ethiopian slaves were also to be found in Ceylon : Jalasti, 'the wazir and ruler of the sea', whom he saw at Colombo, had a force of 'about five hundred Abyssinians'.⁹

Bengal

There is no doubt that in the following century Ethiopian slaves were reaching India in growing numbers, particularly on the east coast in the Bengal area where they were destined to play no mean rôle in the political sphere. In the second half of the fifteenth century it is recorded that Rukn-ud-din Barbak Shah, King of Bengal (1460-1481), began to maintain large numbers of them for military purposes, raising some to high positions.¹⁰ He is said to have owned as many as eight thousand African slaves, some of whom rapidly gained authority in the realm.¹¹ When his grandson, Sikander II, was deposed in 1481 after a rule of only a few months, his successor, Jalal-ud-din Fath Shah, endeavoured to curb their power which had apparently become dangerous to the monarchy. But the angry Habshis, fearing his continued enmity, conspired against him under the leadership of a eunuch who, in 1486, had

6. Ibn Battuta, p. 224.

7. *ibid.*, pp. 229-30.

8. *ibid.*, p. 236.

9. *ibid.*, p. 260.

10. Majumdar and others, p. 345.

11. *Cambridge History*, Vol. III, p. 268.

him murdered and usurped the throne of Bengal under the style of Barbak Shah, Sultan Shahzada.¹²

The Habshis, however, were by no means united in their purpose. When the commander-in-chief, Indil Khan, an Ethiopian of proved ability, who was absent from Gaur, the capital, on a distant campaign, heard of his master's murder, he determined to avenge him. He was considering on what pretext he could lead his troops back to the capital when he received a summons from Barbak to return there. He discovered that the eunuch's rule was already unpopular and soon found an opportunity to murder him. Pressed by the widow of Jalal-ud-din and the courtiers of Gaur, Indil Khan, after displaying some decent reluctance, himself ascended the throne of Bengal under the title of Saif-ud-din-Firuz. If the author of the *Riyaz-us-Salatin* is to be relied on, the confidence he had won as administrator and commander was justified by his measures, though he was indiscriminately charitable.¹³ Despite repeated warnings and protests by his courtiers and advisers, he wasted the public revenues by lavishing them on beggars.

When Indil Khan died in 1489, the nobles placed on the throne a surviving son of Jalal-ud-din¹⁴ with the title of Nasir-ud-din Mahmoud Shah II. As the king was but a child the administration fell into the hands of his counsellors, the most important of whom was another Habshi, Habesh Khan,¹⁵ whose virtual monopoly of power excited the discontent of other courtiers of various nationalities. One of these, another ambitious Habshi, known as Sidi Badr 'the madman', caused the young king to be put to death and seized the throne under the title of Shams-ud-din Abu Nasar Muzaaffar Shah. His reign of just over three years is said to have been marked by tyranny and disorder. He made the fatal mistake of reducing the emoluments of the army. Opposition reached such lengths that the chief minister, Ala-ud-din Husain, an Arab by descent, led a revolt against him. The king, whose forces amounted to five thousand well-mounted Abyssinians and twenty-five thousand Afghan and Bengal troops, was besieged in Gaur for three months, at the end of which time he died. The nobles of Bengal then elected the rebel leader to the throne in 1493, on receiving guarantees that he would govern in the manner which, in the nineteenth century, was imposed on European constitutional monarchs.¹⁶

12. Majumdar and others, p. 346.

13. *ibid.*, p. 346; Stewart, pp. 102-3, 106-7.

14. It is also asserted that this was the son of Indil Khan. *Vide* Stewart, pp. 107-8.

15. Not to be confused with the Ethiopian Nasir, also known as Habash Khan, who entered the service of Gujarat in 1537. *Vide Cambridge History*, Vol. III, p. 337.

16. *Cambridge History*, Vol. III, pp. 269-70; Stewart, pp. 208-9.

The accession of Ala-ud-din Shah marked the end of the disturbances. He immediately disbanded or expelled the Hindu infantry, who had come to play a part similar to that of the Praetorian Guards in Rome, and the Habshis who, having tasted the sweets of power, were considered a danger to the throne. During the seventeen years preceding Ala-ud-din Husain's accession, writes Sir Wolseley Haig in the *Cambridge History of India*, 'three kings of this (Habshi) race had occupied the throne, and there was every reason to fear that they might become a ruling caste. The exiles in vain sought an asylum in Delhi and Jaunpur, where they were too well known to be welcome, and most of them ultimately drifted to the Deccan and Gujarat, where men of their race had for many years been largely employed'.¹⁷

The Deccan

While Ethiopian, Turkish and Arab commanders were conspiring against each other in Bengal, a longer and even more complicated struggle for power was going on in the Bahmani kingdom, in the south-west of the sub-continent whose bloody history abounds in the exploits and conspiracies of Ethiopian and other foreign soldiers and men of State. In the Deccan the practice of employing foreigners in state service was initiated at a relatively early date by Mujahid Shah (1373-1377). About half a century later, in 1422, we find the Habshi bodyguard assuming considerable importance, for it is said that when Firuz Shah died in that year its allegiance was an important factor in determining the succession which went to the king's brother, Ahmad Shah.¹⁸

The new king became an open adherent of the Shiah branch of Islam, alienating himself from the Deccanis who were of the Sunni branch. This accentuated a struggle which was developing between the native Deccani population and the Habshis, on the one hand, and the increasing numbers of other foreign mercenaries on the other. In the second half of the fifteenth century the records of the kingdom are largely concerned with the struggle between the two factions. The Habshis found themselves in opposition to the other foreigners, for, like the native population, they were Sunnis, and for reasons of race and colour were not fully accepted by the other foreigners, most of whom were light-skinned. The Shiah Turks, Arabs, Mughuls and Persians were therefore ranged in one party, and the Sunni Deccanis and Habshis in another. The latter also enjoyed the support of the *Muwallads*, a name applied to the offspring of African fathers and Indian mothers.¹⁹

17. *Cambridge History*, Vol. III, p. 271; Stewart, p. 111.

18. Powell-Price, pp. 195, 197. 19. *Cambridge History*, Vol. III, pp. 403-4.

During the reign of Ala-ud-din Ahmad of the Deccan (1436-1458) the Ethiopians and Deccanis lost favour at court. The foreigners stood at the right of the throne, the Deccanis and Habshis being relegated to the left. Ala-ud-din Ahmad was succeeded by his son, Humayun, who in his own day was called Zalim ('the tyrant') and is described in the *Cambridge History of India* as a 'homicidal maniac'. It is recorded that his rule, hated alike in his harem and in the country, was brought to an end in September 1461, when helplessly drunk, he was stabbed to death by an Ethiopian maid-servant.²⁰

In the second half of the fifteenth century during the reigns of King Nizam (1461-1463) and Mohamed III (1463-1482), honours and offices of State were evenly distributed among the different parties. During the latter reign Khudavand Khan and the eunuch Dastur Dinar, both Ethiopians, ruled the provinces of Mahur and Gulbarga respectively; Habshis thus ruled two of the four provinces. Despite this arrangement the various factions soon conspired against each other. In 1481 a Habshi leader called Miftah joined with the Deccanis to persuade Mahmud, the Ethiopian Keeper of Seals, to affix his private seal on a blank paper which they then filled with false information and presented to the king. By this stratagem they succeeded in discrediting one of their principal opponents, Mahmud Gavan, a foreigner, whom the king ordered to be put to death. Mahmud was promptly executed by another of the king's Habshi servants, a certain Jauhar.²¹

Mohamed III died in the following year while the country was still unsettled as a result of Mahmud Gavan's execution. The King's son, Mahmud (1482-1518), succeeded to the throne with the aid of a Turkish faction, but nonetheless appointed an Ethiopian, Dilavar Khan, as assistant minister of finance. In 1486 Malik Hassan, a Moslemized Hindu who had become the principal man of State, ordered the Deccanis to massacre all the foreign troops, whom he considered a danger to his position, thus provoking a new round of troubles. It seemed at first that the massacre would be successful, but reinforcements for the foreigners' cause entered Bidar, the capital, from the countryside and street fighting continued for twenty days. Finally Malik Hassan consolidated his position and was able to control the country as a dictator for the next four years. The Habshi, Dilavar Khan, bitter at being excluded from power, found an ally in the young king who appealed to him, hoping for liberation from his all-powerful minister. The Ethiopian attempted the assassination of Malik Hassan but failed and was obliged to

20. *ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 412.

21. *ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 413-14, 417-20.

flee the country while King Mahmud became virtually Malik's prisoner.²²

After several rebellions against the dictator, Mahmud appealed to Dastur Dinar, and to other courtiers of various races to free him by killing Malik Hassan. Another attempt was made on Malik's life but he escaped; he broke into the treasury and began to raise troops; but before long one of his followers strangled him, sending his head to the king in the hope of obtaining preferment.

Meanwhile the quarrel between the Deccani-Habshi faction and the other foreigners continued unabated. In November 1487 the Deccanis broke into the palace in an attempt to murder King Mahmud who succeeded, however, in escaping with the help of the foreigners. The Deccani population outside, hearing the tumult in the palace, tried to plunder the houses of the foreigners, but failed as the foreign troops speedily regained control of the city. The king, who owed his life and throne to the foreigners, now turned against the Deccani-Habshi faction and ordered a general massacre which continued for three days.²³

The above-mentioned events marked the beginning of the decline of the Deccan Kingdom. In 1490 Ahmadnagar, Bijapur and Berar declared their independence of Bidar, the Deccan capital, where power had been usurped by a Turkish minister, Qasim Barid-ul-Mamalik. The Ethiopian, Dilavar Khan, once again came to the aid of King Mahmud. Together they drove this second usurper from the capital and defeated him in battle. Immediately afterwards, however, Dilavar's army was thrown into confusion by an unruly elephant; victory was turned into defeat and Dilavar was slain. Qasim Barid-ul-Mamalik then returned to the capital and turned the king into a puppet. In the next few years he consolidated his position, reducing the powers of the provincial governors. In 1495 he transferred Dastur Dinar, who had been appointed governor of Western Telingana, to his old fief, Gulbarga, in order that Yusuf Adil Shah, a Turkish supporter of the regime, might take his place. Resenting this demotion, Dastur Dinar rebelled and occupied much of his former province. In a clash with government forces he was defeated and sentenced to death, but was subsequently pardoned and reinstated in Gulbarga. This unexpected clemency was followed by a bitter quarrel between Dastur Dinar and Yusuf Adil Shah whose daughter had married the king's son in 1494 and who resented Dastur Dinar's reinstatement. Considering that the Turk was growing too powerful, Qasim unexpectedly gave his support to the Ethiopian and renewed fighting broke out. Despite

22. *ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 422-3.

23. *ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 424-5.

this support Dastur Dinar and his friends were driven from the city, while Yusuf seized possession of the king; for a moment he was master of the situation, but Qasim soon resumed his former ministerial position.²⁴

For the next decade the situation remained comparatively stable with Qasim in firm control, supporting Dastur Dinar, as a counterpoise to Yusuf. In 1504, however, Qasim died. He was automatically succeeded as minister by his son, Amir Ali Barid. Yusuf seized this opportunity to march on Gulbarga where he defeated and killed Dastur Dinar who had resumed the governorship and annexed the province to his own dominions. He then took rigorous action to establish the Shiah faith to which he was devoutly attached. This inevitably led to a Sunni reaction on the part of the Deccanis and Habshis. Amir Ali ordered King Mahmud, his virtual prisoner, to call his armies forth to destroy the over-ambitious governor of Western Telingana. Among the nobles instructed to proceed against him was another Habshi, Khudavand Khan, who, with several other Sunni chiefs, refrained from taking part in the action as they were well disposed to Yusuf and antagonistic to Amir Ali. Nevertheless Yusuf was obliged to flee the country for a time; later he took advantage of dissensions among his enemies to resume his former position.²⁵

Several years later, in 1514, Amir Ali conferred on Jahangir Khan, the adopted son of Dastur Dinar, the title of Dastur-ul-Mamalik, and established him in his father's province of Gulbarga. In 1517 we find Amir Ali launching a campaign against Shaza Khan, another of the younger generation of Habshi nobles, the son and successor of Khudavand Khan. Shaza Khan and one of his brothers were killed in battle, but Amir Ali was obliged to abandon his attack and left Ghalib Khan, still another son of Khudavand Khan, in Mahur as his vassal.

Meanwhile in Bijapur the conflict between the different factions had resulted in a decree of 1510 forbidding Deccanis and Ethiopians, and even their children, from holding offices of State. This edict, however, was soon a dead letter. Ibrahim Adil Shah (1534-1558) decided to establish the Sunni tenets as the State belief. In March 1537 he dismissed the majority of the foreign officers of State, who were of the Shiah faction, and raised the Deccanis and Habshis to power. After a reign of almost a quarter of a century Ibrahim was succeeded by his son Ali (1558-1580) who reversed his father's policy, restoring the Shiah sect and dismissing the Sunni adherents.

24. *ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 428.

25. *ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 429-31.

A decade or so later in Bijapur the Shiah Ali Adil Shah was assassinated by a favourite eunuch to whom he had given offence, and was succeeded by his nephew, Ibrahim Adil Shah II (1580–1627), a nine-year-old boy whose education was in the hands of the Queen dowager, Chand Bibi. Quarrels between Shiah and Sunnis once again resulted in conflict. Kishvas Khan, a Decanni noble, eventually seized Chand Bibi and imprisoned her in the fortress of Satara after assassinating Sayid Mustafa, one of her foremost military commanders. Three Habshi nobles, Ikhlas Khan, Hamid Khan and Dilavar Khan (the second Ethiopian of this name to reach prominence) now organized such powerful opposition to the Deccani dictator that he was obliged to abandon the capital with the young king. He fled to Golconda where he was killed by one of the local people in revenge for his murder of Sayid Mustafa. Ikhlas Khan at once assumed the regency, but when Queen Chand Bibi returned from Satara, she dismissed him and appointed another military noble, Afzal Khan Shirazi, in his place. Dissatisfied by this ingratitude to their leader the Habshis slew this minister and expelled the leading foreigners from the city. Ikhlas Khan, who resumed his dictatorship, summoned Ain-ul-Mulk, one of the provincial governors whom he suspected, with the object of imprisoning or removing him, but the latter had the foresight to bring his whole contingent with him to the capital. He seized the Ethiopian nobles when they came out to meet him, and led them as prisoners through the streets. Upon hearing a rumour that the royal guards were about to rise in support of the Habshis, however, he became panic-stricken and fled with his troops, leaving behind his prisoners who returned to power.

In the neighbouring Kingdom of Ahmadnagar the Habshis had remained influential. In 1567 they had joined other foreigners in opposition to the Queen Mother, Daulat Shah.²⁶ Taking advantage of the dissensions at Bijapur, Ahmadnagar forces attacked the city, while the Bijapur foreigners who had been expelled, unwilling to make common cause with the Ethiopians, either joined the invader or remained outside the city walls. When it became evident that the Habshis could not defend the city alone, they furnished, Sir Wolseley Haig declares, 'the only example of self-denying patriotism to be found in the history of this strife of factions', by tendering their resignation to Chand Bibi. The foreigners, who had thus gained their way, then came to the rescue of the city and obliged the army of Ahmadnagar to withdraw.

As might be expected, the retreat of the enemy enabled the internal conflict in Bijapur to revive. The Habshi Ikhlas Khan

26. *ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 434, 439, 451.

attacked Dilavar Khan, the leader of the moderate party of Ethiopians, in the citadel, but was deserted by his supporters and was captured and blinded by Dilavar, who now became supreme ruler. During the period of his rule (1582-1590) he re-established the Sunni faith in Bijapur, but endeavoured to secure peace with the kingdoms of Shiah persuasion by matrimonial alliances between Ibrahim II and the rulers of neighbouring States.²⁷

Dilavar Khan was eventually defeated in a campaign against Ahmadnagar in May 1591 whereupon his control in Bijapur collapsed. He fled from the city and found service with Burhan II who had meanwhile seized the throne of Ahmadnagar. Ibrahim II protested in vain at Burhan's employment of the former Ethiopian military dictator of Bijapur. Burhan replied by declaring war but was unsuccessful in battle and had to make peace. His Deccani troops then turned against him after the murder of his heir, Ismail, who had supported them. They found a ready leader in Ikhlas Khan whose ambitions had been thwarted by Dilavar Khan, his compatriot and rival, in the days of his control of Bijapur. However, in 1595, Ikhlas Khan and the Deccanis failed in their attempt to march on Ahmadnagar city and dethrone Burhan. The latter drove them back, but was a sick man and died soon afterwards, on 28 April 1595.²⁸

He was succeeded by his son, Ibrahim Nizam Shah (1595-1596), whose mother had been an Ethiopian. His minister, Miyan Manjhu, a Deccani, granted an amnesty to Ikhlas Khan and his faction, allowing them to return to the city of Ahmadnagar. Ikhlas and his followers at once persuaded the young king to declare war on Bijapur against the advice of the minister. The king was killed in the fighting, and the question of the succession created new difficulties. Chand Bibi, the old queen, who had returned to Ahmadnagar, the home of her youth, supported Ibrahim's infant son, Bahadur, while Ikhlas Khan proposed Khudabanda, alleged to be the sixth son of Burhan Nizam Shah I, whom he proclaimed king under the title of Ahmad Nizam Shah II. It soon transpired that Khudabanda was an impostor, but this did not prevent him from obtaining the support of Miyan Manjhu; civil war broke out.

The Ethiopians and Deccanis, who had hitherto been united in support of the impostor, soon quarrelled. The Ethiopians proclaimed a child of unknown origin as King Moti Shah, while Miyan Manjhu, who was temporarily getting the worst of the struggle, appealed for help to Sultan Murad, the second son of the Mughul Emperor Akbar, who was the governor of the neighbouring province

27. *ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 458-61.

28. *ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 462-3.

of Gujarat. Miyan Manjhu lived to regret this request for he succeeded in overcoming the Habshis only to find that the Mughul armies had invaded the country.

In the confused situation of the time there were two Ethiopian factions, besides a Deccani party led by Miyan Manjhu, and a legitimist group organized by Chand Bibi in support of the child Bahadur. The Habshis were thus divided between followers of Ikhlas Khan, who acknowledged Moti Shah, and followers of Ahang (or Abhang) Khan and Habashi Khan, who gave their support to Prince Ali, the third son of Burhan Nizam. Being divided into hostile groups neither the Ethiopians, nor any of the other factions, had any chance of success in face of the Mughul forces which now advanced. Ibrahim II of Bijapur, perturbed by the danger menacing the whole of the Deccan, appealed in vain for unity at Ahmadnagar. Ikhlas Khan and Ahang Khan, the two most important Ahmadnagar commanders, both Habshis, were defeated by the Mughul army though they led cavalry forces of ten thousand and seven thousand men respectively. Queen Chand Bibi had therefore little choice but to make peace, and was obliged to surrender the northern province of Berar. She then appointed a new minister, Mohamed Khan, who proved so oppressive that she appealed to Ibrahim II of Bijapur for aid. Her request was granted and after four months' resistance the minister surrendered, whereupon Chand Bibi appointed the Ethiopian Ahang Khan to his place.

War soon broke out anew between the Mughul empire and Ahmadnagar. Ahang Khan obtained help from Bijapur, but the Bijapur army was severely defeated by the Mughuls in February 1597. Ahang Khan now quarrelled with Chand Bibi, whom he imprisoned in the fort of Ahmadnagar. After further internal disputes it became evident that the Mughuls could no longer be resisted, and in 1599 Chand Bibi finally surrendered to them. As soon as this news was known she was torn to pieces by the crowd who regarded her action as treachery.²⁹

Early in the seventeenth century we find another prominent Habshi, Malik Ambar (1549-1626), holding the post of chief minister in the shrunken kingdom of Ahmadnagar. Originally a slave who had been purchased in Baghdad, he had proved a capable leader of men. In 1601 he won considerable prominence by defeating the Mughul forces in south-western Berar³⁰ and succeeded in establishing Murtaza Nizam Shah II (1603-1630) as the nominal ruler in the south of Ahmadnagar though Mughul troops were still

29. *ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 464-6; *vide* also Ross, Vol. III, p. xlviii.

30. Cambridge History, Vol. IV, p. 148; *vide* also Chaudhuri, *passim*; Lalit Kala, *passim*.

in the capital.³¹ Malik Ambar, who, to render his position secure, kept the king a virtual prisoner, served Ahmadnagar with courage, ability and devotion. 'His reorganization of the revenue system of the kingdom on sound lines', writes Professor Kalinkar Datta, 'contributed to its financial stability, and his training of the soldiers, mostly Marathas, in the guerrilla method of warfare enabled them to cope successfully with the imperialists.'³² Mutamid Khan, the Mughul court-chronicler, describes him thus: 'This Ambar was a slave, but an able man. In warfare, in command, in sound judgment, and in administration, he had no rival or equal. He well understood the predatory warfare, which in the language of the Dakhin is called *bargi-giri*. He kept down the turbulent spirits of that country, maintained his exalted position to the end of his life and closed his career with honour.' 'He was the first', declares J. C. Powell-Price, 'to realize the value of the Maratha horse light cavalry who were skilled in guerilla tactics. Their rapid movements, untrammelled by the unwieldy baggage trains which were now making the Mughul armies moving camps and not fighting bodies, made full use of the broken Deccan country for sudden stabs on flank and rear, and their lightning forays cut off supplies and made an advance in force a dangerous business.'³³

Malik Ambar died in 1626 at a ripe old age. His son, Fath Khan, submitted to the Mughuls almost immediately afterwards at Jalna, but later joined his king, Murtaza Nizam Shah, in attacking them. The monarch, however, appointed another Habshi, Hamid Khan, to the post of minister and fell completely under his influence and that of his wife. This remarkable woman, who obtained access to the king's harem, became the recognized means of communication between him and his subjects and even on occasion assumed control of the army. In 1626 she defeated the army of Bijapur which was attacking Ahmadnagar and captured all its elephants. In the following year, Hamid Khan attempted to follow up this victory by invading Bijapur, but was decisively defeated.³⁴

Another prominent Habshi, Yaqut Khudavand Khan, had meanwhile led a number of other Habshis over to the Mughul Emperor Jahangir (1605-1627) as a protest against the influence and alleged corruption of the wife of their compatriot Hamid Khan. However, they soon deserted the Emperor and were hunted down as traitors, Yaqut being killed in battle by Mughul forces. It is said that the Abyssinians fought bravely to protect their leader

31. *Cambridge History*, Vol. III, p. 159.

32. Majumdar and others, p. 467.

33. Powell-Price, p. 291.

34. *Cambridge History*, Vol. IV, pp. 189, 263-4.

and 'gathered together like ants and locusts' in a vain effort to carry away his dead body. His grandsons, the children of his son, Fakhr-ul-Mulk, nevertheless made their submission to the Emperor and were granted fiefs in the Deccan.³⁵

Hamid's defeat meanwhile had undermined his position and opened the way for Fath Khan's rise to power. In 1630 the Mughuls launched a new attack on Ahmadnagar. Fath Khan, being doubtful of his influence over the changeable king, put him in prison, as his father had done before him. He later killed him and proclaimed his young son Husain Nizam Shah III (1630-1633) King of Ahmadnagar. Randola Khan, a prominent Habshi general in Bijapur, now persuaded Fath Khan to join in the struggle against the Mughuls who consequently launched a new attack, driving Fath Khan and Husain Nizam Shah into Daulatabad but, as often before, the invading armies were soon compelled to retreat through a scarcity of supplies. In the following year Fath Khan obtained a respite by sending his son, Abdur-Rasul, to the imperial Mughul court with gifts. One year later, however, the Mughul general, Mahabat Khan, began to invest the fortifications of Ambar Kot, which Malik Ambar had built in Daulatabad. Despite the opposition of a Bijapur army, led by Randola Khan, and Shahji, a Maratha, the invaders were successful. After a six-week siege a long stretch of the outer wall and part of a bastion were blown up. Fath Khan, knowing that the defences were destroyed and that an epidemic had broken out in the fortress, arranged a truce after much negotiation, his son being handed over as hostage to Mahabat Khan. Fath Khan and Husain Nizam Shah, the boy king, were then sent to the imperial court. Their lives were spared; Fath was allowed to live in Lahore with an ample pension, while the luckless Husain was committed to the State prison in Gwalior fort.³⁶

The flow of Ethiopian slaves into India continued for another two centuries with the result that they played an important rôle in affairs of State throughout the Mughul period, in fact until the eve of British rule. Mention should be made of Atish Habshi (*d.* 1651), sometime governor of Bihar and later of the Deccan,³⁷ Habsh Khan Sidi Miftah Habshi, who received much honour from the Mughul Emperor Aurangzib (1658-1707), his son, Ahmad Khan, who also attained high rank,³⁸ and Dilavar Habshi (*d.* 1702-3),³⁹ also a sometime governor of the Deccan, who established yet

35. Samsamu-d-Daula Nawaz Khan, Vol. I, p. 990. *Vide* also p. 305.

36. *Cambridge History*, Vol. IV, pp. 192-3, 264-5; Samsamu-d-Daula Nawaz Khan, Vol I, p. 532, Vol. II, p. 626.

37. *ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 305.

38. *ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 594.

39. *ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 33. *Vide* also Sarkar, Vol. I, pp. 248-50.

another Habshi as his successor.⁴⁰ Contact between both sides of the Indian Ocean was in fact fairly close and in 1661-2 an Ethiopian diplomatic mission led by the Armenian Murad was received by the Mughul Emperor Aurangzib.⁴¹

Amba Geshen and Asirgarh

There is reason to suppose that the great influx of Ethiopians into India, besides producing a blending of race may have had some effect on Indian social life. Dr. C. F. Beckingham has recently asserted that the Ethiopian slaves in India probably introduced into the Moslem Kingdom of Khandesh (north of Ahmadnagar) what he describes as 'one of the most characteristic features of the contemporary Ethiopian polity', namely, 'the imprisonment on a closely guarded mountain of all, or nearly all, male members of the reigning dynasty'.⁴² Reviewing the works of the contemporary Persian and Arab writers, Abu Fazl, Shirhindi, Abd Allah Mohamed bin Umar al-Makki al-Asafi Ulughani and the Portuguese Fernão Guerreiro, he points out that 'though they differ on many details they leave no doubt that in Khandesh great power was exercised by Habshis and in particular by one whom al-Makki names Malik Yakuk Sultani'. This lends considerable interest to the fact that members of the ruling house in Khandesh were imprisoned in the mountain fortress of Asirgarh, in much the same way as the Ethiopian royalty were detained on the mountain Amba Geshen. 'It is obvious', Beckingham concludes, 'that there was a close resemblance between the custom in Ethiopia and in Khandesh. Though we do not know precisely when it was adopted by the Farukis (the local Khandesh dynasty), we can say with confidence that it was practised in Ethiopia by the early fourteenth century, so that it was in operation there before Khandesh came into existence as an independent State. Since those Habshis, who really were Ethiopians by origin, must have been familiar with it in their homeland, it may well be that they introduced it into a State which they came to dominate.'⁴³

40. Samsamu-d-Daula Nawaz Khan, Vol. II, p. 994.

41. *Cambridge History*, Vol. IV, pp. 229, 317.

42. Beckingham, *Amba Geshen and Asirgarh*, p. 182.

43. *ibid.*, p. 188.

APPENDIX F

Ibrahim Hannibal, Ancestor of Alexander Pushkin

ONE OF the most interesting of the many slaves taken from East Africa was Ibrahim or Abraham, the great-grandfather of the Russian poet Alexander Pushkin (1799–1837), and himself a man of distinction.¹ Pushkin made the somewhat legendary story of his Ethiopian ancestor the subject of an unfinished novel, *The Negro of Peter the Great*, and discusses the subject of his ancestry again in his notes to Chapter One of *Eugene Onegin*. He there affirms that on his mother's side he was of African origin. His great-grandfather, later known as Hannibal, had, he said, been kidnapped at the age of eight from the shores of Africa and brought to Constantinople. 'There the Russian Ambassador paid a ransom for him and sent him as a present to Peter the Great, who christened Abraham in Vilna. . . . In his declining years Hannibal could still remember Africa, the lavish existence of his father, his nineteen brothers, all older than himself . . . he remembered his favourite sister Lagan(?) who swam after the vessel on which he was borne away. . . .'

N. Izmailov, of the Institute of Russian Literature of the U.S.S.R. Academy of Sciences, argues that only the main facts of Pushkin's story are accurate. According to Izmailov, whose account also contains much obviously unreliable detail, Abraham's father (whose name has not been ascertained) was a prince(?) in North Ethiopia, which later became Eritrea, where he owned the Logon(?) area situated on the right bank of the Mareb river, and which forms part of the Hamasien plateau. He was, it is claimed, a powerful and wealthy lord, and, like all rich Muslims, the head of a large family, consisting of several wives and their offspring. Ibrahim was born in or about 1698 (the exact date is not known), as the youngest son of the youngest wife, his father's favourite. Ismailov states that Ibrahim's father was a vassal of the Turkish Sultan and when the latter demanded hostages, Ibrahim was sent with them, but this is almost certainly incorrect as Turkish rule did not extend to the Mareb. The Russian writer goes on to assert that Ibrahim's departure makes the object of a moving story of how his favourite sister Lagan (whose name is perhaps wrongly given after the name of the area) unable to save her brother, swam after the ship and drowned at sea. Later, after Ibrahim had been living in Russia for a long time and his father had died, one of his brothers came to

1. *Vide Ethiopia Observer*, Vol. I, No. 8.

Peter the Great and offered a ransom for him. But the Tsar would not let him go, and he himself did not want to leave his new homeland. It is probably only after this point that the account acquires much accuracy.

When Ibrahim was brought to Constantinople he was placed in the Sultan's seraglio and stayed there for about a year. The Russian Ambassador, P. A. Tolstoy, a distinguished diplomat of those days, was trying to find, on Peter's request, 'small Negro boys', to follow the fashion of the European courts. The little Ethiopian seemed to meet the case. Ibrahim was stolen from the seraglio (he was bought from the seraglio overseer) and sent – probably by sea round Europe – to far-off Russia. That happened in 1705 or 1706; the boy was at the time either seven or eight years old.

In Moscow the little African was attached to the person of the Tsar who at once took a liking for him for his quick intelligence. In 1707, when he was in Vilna, Tsar Peter christened Ibrahim; Peter was his godfather, and the queen of Poland his godmother. The boy was named Peter, but since he cried and did not want to give up his own name, he was given the Russian version of the name Ibrahim–Abraham, and his patronymic became Petrovich. Hence the official name Abraham Petrov by which he was known for a long time in the Tsar's service and which he signed himself. The surname of Hannibal appeared much later; it was used once or twice during Peter the Great's lifetime, but was not definitely adopted before the third decade of 1700, not earlier than 1742. The origin of that surname has not been ascertained; it is unknown whether it was suggested by Tsar Peter or by Abraham himself, or whether, as some Russian biographers believe, it was phonetically derived from an unidentified Logon village called Addiballo(?). At any rate this surname became definitely his and his descendants. Hannibal's first biographers wrote at the end of the eighteenth century (probably as related by his sons) that he was descended from the famous general of Carthage, but this legend is entirely groundless.

For ten years, beginning in 1707, Peter the Great did not part with his godson; the latter accompanied him in his campaigns and battles and studied at the same time. Later he became the honorary drummer in the bombardier company of the Preobrazhensky Regiment in which Peter himself was captain. Then the Tsar made him a sort of private secretary. His biographer, who used information obtained from Hannibal's son, says that Peter would often wake Ibrahim up in the night and dictate ideas that occurred to him in bed; Ibrahim wrote them down on a slate and in the morning these notes would be rewritten and transformed into orders, decrees and instructions on civil and military affairs. As

Pushkin said of Hannibal, 'to follow the thoughts of a great man is a wonderful school'; and to make the grade at such a school a young man had to be truly gifted and educated.

During the journey he made abroad in 1717 Peter left Abraham Petrov in France to improve his knowledge of gunnery and engineering. Hannibal joined the French army, took part in the war against Spain, was wounded and received a commission. Then he went to a military school at Metz where he completed his studies in artillery and engineering. He spent some years in France and returned to St. Petersburg in the beginning of 1723. According to family legend, Peter the Great left the capital to meet his godson, and this meeting is splendidly described in Pushkin's historical novel *The Negro of Peter the Great*. Abraham Petrov was commissioned lieutenant-bombardier in the Preobrazhensky Regiment which was regarded as a great distinction for such a young man. He subsequently resumed his secretarial duties for the Tsar and was at the same time teaching mathematics and the art of fortification to young nobles. He brought from Paris a good library of some four hundred volumes on military science, mathematics, history, philosophy and politics as well as *belles-lettres*. The catalogue of that library indicates that he was well versed in a wide range of subjects and fully abreast of contemporary learning. Peter the Great had every reason to be satisfied with his charge and helper. In 1726 Abraham Petrov wrote a book on the art of engineering and presented it, evidently in manuscript form, to Peter's successor, Catherine I. The work was not published.

Peter the Great died on 25 January 1725, and this marked for Hannibal the beginning of years of wandering, disfavour and idleness. The period of *coups d'état* and struggle among favourite courtiers adversely affected him. He was opposed to Menshikov, so when the latter came into favour (1727) he sent Hannibal to distant Eastern Siberia to build the Selehgin and other fortresses on the Russian-Chinese frontier. This assignment was to all intents and purposes plain exile. Later, on the orders of the new favourites – the Dolgorukys – he was arrested, but his life was saved owing to a change of the regime: Empress Anna Ioannovna came to the throne. He was recalled to St. Petersburg and appointed to 'engineering and fortification affairs' on the Baltic shores. After serving in this capacity for a short time Abraham Hannibal retired, evidently because he was not content with his subordinate position and uninteresting work.

A new change on Russia's throne in 1740 enabled Hannibal to resume service; then the *coup d'état* which brought to the throne the daughter of Peter the Great in 1741, radically changed the fate

of the late Tsar's godson; he was made a general and appointed governor of Reval where he could actively undertake the reconstruction of the fortifications and port installations. In 1746 the Empress gave him a vast estate in the Pskov gubernia, including the village of Mikhailovskoye which became famous eighty years later when Hannibal's renowned great-grandson Pushkin was exiled there by Alexander I.

In 1752 Major-General Hannibal was put in charge of all military engineering in Russia and in this capacity he displayed to the full his skill as a technician and organizer. . . . He supervised the construction of a series of frontier forts in Siberia and transformed the whole system of fortresses on Russia's north-western and southern borders; he was head of the engineering and artillery school – the only establishment of its kind in Russia in those days; he did much to improve the waterways near St. Petersburg – the Ladoga and Kronstadt canals. He was rewarded for his services with the rank of General-in-Chief, and the order of Alexander Nevsky. Being in need of rest after his labours and suffering from the consequences of the wound he received in the Spanish war, he finally retired in 1762 and settled in one of his estates near St. Petersburg. There he lived for almost twenty years, 'like a sage', as his biographer puts it, 'in peace and tranquillity', and died on 14 May 1781, at the age of eighty-three. . . .

When Bulgaria, the hack-writer and police informer, dared to jeer at the poet Pushkin, pretending that his ancestor had been bought for a bottle of rum by some skipper, Pushkin rejoined with verses both angry and dignified in which he said that the skipper (Peter the Great) steered Russia forward and enhanced her glory, and that the African he had bought became industrious and incorruptible, the Tsar's friend, not his flunkey. In the same verses the poet recalled another Hannibal, Ivan Abramovich, the son of Abraham Petrovich, who became prominent in the navy and as an administrator in the second half of the eighteenth century. He built the town of Kherson and was the hero of the Russian-Turkish war of 1769–1774, during which he captured the fortress of Navarin and won fame in the naval battle of Cesme.²

2. From an unpublished account by N. Izmailov in the present author's possession.

APPENDIX G

Bibliography on Aksumite Currency

- Anzani, A., *Numismatica Axumita*, 1926; *Numismatica e Storia d'Etiopia*, 1930.
- Clark, W. L., *Rivista Italiana di Numismatica*, 1941.
American Numismatic Society Museum Notes, 1948.
- Conti Rossini, C., *Africa Italiana*, 1927; *Rassegna Numismatica*, 1935; *Storia d'Etiopia*, 1928.
- Doresse, J., *L'Empire du Prêtre-Jean*, 1957, Vol. I, pp. 129-33, 278-82.
- Douin, E., *Revue Archéologique*, 1882.
- Kammerer, A., *La Mer Rouge, l'Abyssinie et l'Arabie depuis l'Antiquité*, 1929, p. 224; *Essai sur l'histoire antique d'Abyssinie*, 1926; *Revue Numismatique*, 1926 and 1934.
- Littmann, E., *Deutsche Aksum-Expedition*, 1913, Vol. 1.
- Prideaux, W. F., *Numismatic Chronicle*, 1884.
- Schlumberger, G., *Revue Numismatique*, 1886.
- Tedesco-Zammarano, V., *Numismatica*, 1947.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

See Appendix G for bibliography on Aksumite Currency

- Abbadie, A d' and Paulitschke, P., *Futuh el Habacha; les conquêtes faites en Abyssinie au XVI^e siècle par l'Imam Muhammed Ahmed dit Gagne: version française de la chronique arabe du Chahab ad Din Ahmad*, 1898.
- Addis Ababa Chamber of Commerce, *Guide Book of Ethiopia*, 1954.
- Albuquerque : see Birch.
- Albuquerque, *Cartas de Afonso de Albuquerque*, 1884-1935.
- Almeida: see *Some Records of Ethiopia*.
- Alvarez, F., *Narrative of the Portuguese Embassy to Abyssinia during the years 1520-1527*, edited by Lord Stanley of Alderley, 1881.
- Arab-Faqih: see Basset.
- Arkell, A. J., *A History of the Sudan*, 1955.
- Baeteman, J., *Dictionnaire Amarigna-Français*, 1929.
- Bakhsh, S. K., *The Renaissance of Islam*, 1937.
- Baratti, G., *The Late Travels of S. Giacomo Baratti into the Remote Countries of the Abissins*, 1670.
- Barbosa, D., *The Book of Duarte Barbosa* (edited by M. L. Dames), 1918.
- Barkhuus, A., *Medicine in Ethiopia*, Ciba Symposia, 1947.
- Basset, R., *Etudes sur l'histoire d'Ethiopie*, *Journal Asiatique*, 1881; *Histoire de la Conquête de l'Abyssinie (XVI^e siècle) par Chihab El-Din Ahmed Ben Abd el-Quader surnomé Arab-Faqih*, 1897-1909.
- Basu, K. K., *The Tarikh-i-Mubarak Shadi*, 1932.
- Beccari, C., *Rerum Aethiopicarum Scriptores Occidentales*, 1903-17.
- Beckingham, C. F., *Amba Geshen and Asirgarh*, *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 1957.
- Beckingham, C. F., and Huntingford, G. W. B., *Some Records of Ethiopia 1593-1646*, 1954.
- Bell, R., *The Origin of Islam in its Christian Environment*, 1926.

- Bemnet Gabra Amlak, *Ya and Qwanqwa edget waim Amariña inda tesfafa*, 1958.
- Bent, J. T., *The Sacred City of the Ethiopians*, 1896.
- Berhanu, Dinqe, *Ya Ityopya Icher Tarik*, 1948.
- Bernier, F., *The Travels of François Bernier*, 1891.
- Bidder, I., *Lalibela, the Monolithic Churches of Ethiopia*, 1959.
- Birch, W. de G., *The Commentaries of the Great Dalboquerque*, 1875-84.
- Blundell, H. W., *The Royal Chronicle of Abyssinia 1769-1840*, 1922.
- Breasted, J. H., *A History of Egypt*, 1952.
- Briggs, J., *History of the Rise of the Mohomedan Power in India till the year A.D. 1612, translated from the original Persian of Mahomed Kasim Ferishita*, 1829.
- Bruce, J., *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile in the years 1768-73*, 1st edition, 1790; 3rd edition, 1813.
- Budge, E. A. W., *A History of Ethiopia*, 1928; *The Queen of Sheba and her only son Menyelek*, 1922.
- Burton, R. F., *First Steps in East Africa*, 1894.
- Bury, J. B., *History of the Roman Later Empire*, 1931.
- Buxton, D. R., *The Christian Antiquities of Northern Ethiopia*, Archaeologia, 1947; *Travels in Ethiopia*, 1949.
- Cambridge History of India*, Vol. III, 1928; Vol. IV, 1937.
- Cartas das novas a el Rey nosso Senhor do descrobimento do preste Johan se*: see *Discovery of Abyssinia by the Portuguese in 1520*.
- Cerulli, E., *Etiopi in Palestina*, 1943; *L'Etiopia medievale in alcuni brani di scrittori arabi*, Rassegna di Studi Etiopici, 1943.
- Chaine, M., *La Chronologie des temps chrétiens de l'Egypte et d'Ethiopie*, 1925.
- Chaudhuri, N. N., *Malik Ambar*, n.d.
- Cheeseman, R. E., *Lake Tana and the Blue Nile*, 1936.
- Chihab El-Din Ahmed Ben Abd el-Qader: see Basset, R.
- Clark, J. D., *The Prehistoric Cultures of the Horn of Africa*, 1954.
- Combes, E., and Tamisier, M., *Voyage en Abyssinie*, 1838.
- Conti Rossini, C., *Di un nuovo codice della cronica etiopica*, Rend. R. Acc. Lincei, 1893; *Donazioni reali alla cattedrale di Aksum*, L'Oriente, 1895; *Historia Regis Sarsa Dengel (Malak Sagad)*, 1907; *Il Gadla Filipos ed il Gadla Yohannes di Dabra Bizan*, Rend. R. Acc. dei Lincei, 1901; *Liber Axumae*, 1910; *Storia d'Etiopia*, 1928.
- Conzelman, W. E., *Chronique de Galawdewos (Claudius), roi d'Ethiopie*, 1895.

- Cosson, E. A. de, *The Cradle of the Blue Nile*, 1877.
- Coulbeaux, J. B., *Histoire politique et religieuse de l'Abyssinie*, 1928.
- Coupland, R., *East Africa and its Invaders*, 1938.
- Couto, D. do, *Decadas da Asia*, 1736.
- Cosmas, *The Christian Topography of Cosmas, an Egyptian Monk* (edited by J. W. McCrindle), 1929.
- Crawford O. G. S., *Ethiopian Itineraries, circa 1400-1524*, 1958;
The Fung Kingdom of Sennar, 1951.
- Curle, A. T., *The Ruined Towns of Somaliland*, Antiquity, 1937.
- Deramey, J., *Les Inscriptions d'Adoulis et d'Axoum*, 1892.
- Devic, L.-M., *Les Pays des Zendjs ou la Côte Orientale de l'Afrique du Moyen-age*, 1892.
- Dillmann, A., *Ethiopic Grammar*, 1907.
- Dindorf, L., *Historia Graeca Minora*, 1870.
- Discovery of Abyssinia by the Portuguese in 1520* (edited by H. Thomas), 1938.
- Doresse, J., *L'Empire du Prêtre-Jean*, 1957.
- Dozy, R. et Goeje, M. J. d', *Description de l'Afrique et de l'Espagne par Adrisi*, 1866.
- Duyvendak, J. J. L., *China's Discovery of Africa*, 1949.
- Einzig, P., *Primitive Money*, n.d.
- Ethiopian Itineraries, circa 1400-1524* (edited by O. G. S. Crawford), 1958.
- Evetts, B. T. A., *The Churches and Monasteries of Egypt*, 1895.
- Ferrand, G., *Les Çomalis*, 1903.
- Findlay, L., *Monolithic Churches of Lalibela*, 1943.
- Flemming, J., *Hiob Ludolf, Beiträge zur Assyriologie und Verleichende Semitische Sprachwissen*, 1890.
- Foster, W., *The Red Sea and Adjacent Countries at the Close of the Seventeenth Century*, 1949.
- Freeman-Grenville, G. P. S., *Chinese Porcelain in Tanganyika*, Tanganyika Notes and Records, 1955.
- Gabra Sellassie : see Guebre Sellassie.
- Gabra Wald Ingida Worq, *Ya Ityopya Maretna Gibir Sim*, 1956.
- Gaudefroy-Demombynes, *Ibn Fadl Al Omari Masalik al Absar fi Mamalik el Amsar*, 1927.
- Gibbon, E., *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 1899.
- Grunebaum, G. E. von, *Medieval Islam*, 1953.
- Guebre Sellassie, *Chronique de Menelik II, Roi des rois d'Ethiopie*, 1930-2.
- Guillain, M., *Documents sur l'Histoire, la Géographie et la Commerce de l'Afrique orientale*, 1856.
- Guida dell'Africa Orientale*: see *Guida d'Italia*.

- Guida d'Italia della Consociazione Turistica Italiana, Africa Orientale Italiana*, 1938.
- Guide Book of Ethiopia*: see Addis Ababa Chamber of Commerce.
- Guidi, I., *Annales Iohannis I, Iyasu I et Bakaffa*, 1905; *Annales Regum Iyasu II et Iyoas*, 1912; *Historia gentis Galla*, 1907; *Il 'Fetha Nagast' o 'Legislazione dei re'*, 1899; *Vocabolario Amarico-Italiano*, 1901.
- Habiballeh, A. B. M., *Foundation of Muslim Rule in India*, 1945.
- Halevy, J., *La Guerre de Sarsa Dengel contre les Falachas*, 1907.
- Harff, A. von, *The Pilgrimage of Arnold von Harff*, 1946.
- Harris, W. C., *The Highlands of Aethiopia*, 1844.
- Hastings, J., *The Dictionary of the Bible*, 1910.
- Hirth, F., and Rockhill, W. W., *Chou Ju Kua; his work on the Chinese and Arab Trade in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries*, 1911.
- Historiale Description de l'Ethiopie*, 1558.
- History and Description of Africa* (edited by R. Brown), 1896.
- Hitti, P. K., *History of the Arabs*, 1951.
- Hodgkin, T., *Nationalism in Colonial Africa*, 1956.
- Hourani, G. F., *Arab Seafaring in the Indian Ocean in Ancient and Early Medieval Times*, 1951.
- Huntingford, G. W. B., *The Galla of Ethiopia*, 1955.
- Hyatt, H. M., *The Church of Abyssinia*, 1928.
- Ibn Battuta, *Travels in Asia and Africa* (edited by H. A. R. Gibb), 1929.
- Jayne, K. G., *Vasco da Gama and His Successors*, 1910.
- Jesman, C., *The Russians in Ethiopia*, 1958.
- Johnston, C., *Travels in Southern Ethiopia*, 1844.
- Jones, W., *Conversations with Abram, an Abyssinian, concerning the City of Gwender and the Sources of the Nile*, Asiatick Researches, 1788.
- Kammerer, A., *Essai sur l'Histoire antique d'Abyssinie; le Royaume d'Aksum et ses voisins d'Arabie et de Meroe*, 1926; *La Mer Rouge, l'Abyssinie et l'Arabie depuis l'Antiquité*, 1929-52; *Le Routier de Dom Joam de Castro*, 1936.
- Kay, H. C., *Taman, its Early Medieval History*, 1892.
- Keller, C., *Alfred Ilg*, 1918.
- Kirkman, J. S., *The Arab City of Gedi*, 1954; *The Culture of the Kenya Coast in the Later Middle Ages*, South African Archaeological Bulletin, 1956; *Historical Archaeology in Kenya*, Antiquaries' Journal, 1957.
- Lalit Kala, *Identification of Malik Ambar*, Lalit Kala, 1958.
- Lamairesse, E., and Dujarric, G., *Vie de Mahomet*, 1898.

- Lane-Poole, S., *A History of Egypt in the Middle Ages*, 1901.
- Lavoix, L., *Lcs Azziministes*, *Gazette de Beaux Arts*, 1862.
- Lefebvre, T., Petit, A., Quartin-Dillon and Vignaud, *Voyage en Abyssinie exécuté pendant lcs années 1839, 1840, 1841, 1842, 1843, 1845-6*.
- Lejean, G., *Voyage en Abyssinie exécuté de 1862 à 1864*, 1872.
- Lettere Annue del Giapone, China, Goa et Ethiopia*, 1621.
- Lettre Annue di Ethiopia*, 1628.
- Levine, D. N., *On the Conceptions of Time and Place in the Amhara World View* (Acc. Naz. dei Lincei), 1960.
- Linchoten, J., *The Voyage of John Huyghen van Linschoten to the Indies* (edited by A. C. Burnell), 1885.
- Littmann, E., *Deutsche Aksum-Expedition*, 1913; *Publications of the Princeton University Expedition to Abyssinia*, 1910-5
- Lobo, J., *A Voyage to Abyssinia by Father Jerome Lobo* (translated by S. Johnson), 1735.
- Longhena, M., *Viaggi in Persia, India e Giava di Nicoli de Conti*, 1929.
- Longrigg, S., *A Short History of Eritrea*, 1945.
- Lucas, A., *Ancient Egyptian Materials and Industries*, 1948.
- Ludolphus, J., *Jobi Ludolfi, alias Leutholf, dicti ad suam Historiam Aethiopicam antehac editam Commentarius* (Commentarius), 1691; *Jobi Ludolfi, alias Leutholf, dicti Historia Aethiopici* (Historia), 1681; *A New History of Ethiopia*, 2nd edition, 1684
- Ludovico di Varthema, *The Travels of Ludovico di Varthema*, 1863.
- Mahteme Sellassie, Balambaras, *The Land System of Ethiopia*, Ethiopia Observer, 1957.
- Majumdar, R. C., Raychaudhuri, H. C., and Datta K., *An Advanced History of India*, 1950.
- Manucci, N., *Storia do Mogor*, 1907.
- Maqdisi, *Descriptio imperii Moslemici* (edited by M. J. de Goeje), 1906.
- Marco Polo, *The Travels of Marco Polo* (translated by L. F. Benedetto and A. Ricci), 1931; (translated by R. Latham), 1958.
- Mehren, M. A. F., *Manuel de la Cosmographie du Moyen Age, traduit de d'Arabe de Shems ed-bin abu-abd allah Mohommed de Damas*, 1874.
- Mérab, Docteur, *Impressions d'Ethiopie*, 1921-9; *Médecins et Médecine en Ethiopie*, 1912.
- Meynard, P. de, and Courteille, P. de, *Maçoudi, les Prairies d'Or*, 1861-77.

- Mills, J. V., *Notes on Early Chinese Trade*, Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, 1951.
- Minorsky, V., *Hudud al Alam, the Regions of the World, a Persian Geography*, 372 A.H. — 982 A.D., 1937.
- Mocquet, J., *Voyages en Afrique, Asie, Indes orientales et occidentales*, 1830.
- Monneret de Villard, U., *Aksum: ricerche di topografia generale*, 1938.
- Monti della Corte, A. A., *I Castelli di Gondar*, 1938; *La Chiese Portuguese di Gorgora sul Tana*, Gli Annali dell'Africa Italiana, Anno I, Vol. II; *Lalibela, le Chiese ipogée e monolitiche e gli altri Monumenti medievale de Lasta*, 1940.
- Mooney, H. F., *A Preliminary List of Ethiopian Plant Names with their Botanical Equivalents*, 1956.
- Mossolov, A. A., *At the Court of the Last Tsar*, 1935.
- Muir, W., *The Life of Mahomet*, 1878.
- Noldeke, T., *Neue Beitrage zur Semitischen Sprachwissenschaft*, 1910.
- Nowell, C. E., *A History of Portugal*, 1952.
- Pais, P., *Historia da Etiopia*, 1945-6.
- Pakenham, T., *The Mountains of Rasselas*, 1959.
- Pankhurst, E. S., *Ethiopia, a Cultural History*, 1955.
- Pankhurst, E. S., and Pankhurst, R. K. P., *Ethiopia and Eritrea, the Last Phase of the Reunion Struggle*, 1953.
- Pankhurst, R. K. P., *The Independence of Ethiopia and her Import of Arms*, Presence Africaine, English edition, Vols. 4/5, Nos. 32/3.
- Pankhurst, R. K. P., and Endreas Eshete, *Self-Help in Ethiopia*, Ethiopia Observer, 1958.
- Paribeni, R., *Richerche nel Luogo dell' antico Adulis*, 1908.
- Pearce, N., *The Life and Adventures of Nathaniel Pearce*, 1831.
- Peiser, F. E., *Hasan ben Ahmed el-Haimi*, 1898.
- Pereira, F. M. E., *Chronica de Susnyos*, 1900; *Historia de Minas, Ademas Sagad*, 1888; *Historia dos Martyres de Nagran*, 1899.
- Periplus, *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* (translated by W. H. Schoff), 1912.
- Perruchon, J., *Les Chroniques de Zara Yaeqob et de Baeda Maryam*, 1893; *Histoire d'Eskender, d'Amda Syon II et de Naod*, Journal Asiatique, 1894; *Histoire des Guerres d'Amda Syon, Roi d'Ethiopie*, Journal Asiatique, 1890; *Légendes relatives à Dawit II (Lebna Dengel)*, Revue Sémitique, 1898; *Notes pour l'Histoire d'Ethiopie*, Revue Sémitique, 1897-8; *Le Règne de Fasilidas*, Revue Sémitique, 1897-8; *Le Règne*

- de Galawdewos*, *Revue Sémitique*, 1894; *Le Règne de Iyasu I, Roi d'Ethiopie*, *Revue Sémitique*, 1901; *Le Règne de Lebna Dengel*, *Revue Sémitique*, 1893; *Le Règne de Minas ou Admas-Sagad*, *Revue Sémitique*, 1896; *La Règne de Sarsa Dengel ou Malak Sagad I*, *Revue Sémitique*, 1896; *Le Règne de Susneyos*, *Revue Sémitique*, 1897; *Le Règne de Yaqob et Za-Dengel*, *Revue Sémitique*, 1896; *Vie de Lalibela, roi d'Ethiopie*, 1892.
- Pires, T. *The Suma Oriental of Tomé Pires* (translated by Arnando Cortesão), 1944.
- Pliny, *Natural History* (edited by H. Rackham), 1947.
- Poncet: see Foster, W.
- Powell-Price, J. C., *A History of India*, 1955.
- Procopius, *History of the Wars* (edited by H. B. Dewing) 1954.
- Quiggin, A. H., *A Survey of Primitive Money*, 1949.
- Ranking, G. S. A., *Ahsanu-t-Taqasim fi-Marifatil-Aqalim, known as al-Muqaddasi*, 1897-1901.
- Raverty, H. G., *Tabakat-i-Nasiri*, 1881.
- Raynaud, F., *Histoire du Commerce du Levant*, 1885-6.
- Reinaud, G. A., *Géographie d'Aboulfeda*, 1848.
- Rey, C. F., *The Romanee of the Portuguese in Abyssinia*, 1929.
- Rockhill, W. W., *Notes of the Relations and Trade of China*, T'oung Pao, Vol. XV.
- Ross, E. D., *An Arabie History of Gujarat*, 1910-28.
- Rostovtzeff, M., *The Social and Economic History of the Hellenistic World*, 1941.
- Rüppell, E., *Reise in Abyssinien*, 1838-40.
- Salt, H., *A Voyage to Abyssinia*, 1814.
- Samsamu-d-Daula Nawaz Khan, *The Maasiru-l-Umara* (translated by H. Beveridge), 1911-4.
- Sanceau, E., *Portugal in Quest of Prester John*, 1944.
- Sarkar, J., *History of Aurangzib*, 1912-25.
- Schjoth, F., *Chinese Curreney*, 1929.
- Schonfield, H. J., *The Suez Canal in World Affairs*, 1952.
- Schweke, B., *Indonesian Soeiological Studies*, 1955.
- Sergeant, R. B., *Forms of Plea*, *Rivista degli Studi Orientali*, 1955.
- Smeds, A., *The Ensete Planting Culture of Eastern Sidamo, Ethiopia*, 1955.
- Some Reeords of Ethiopia, 1593-1646* (edited by C. F. Beckingham and G. W. B. Huntingford), 1954.
- Speke, J. H., *Journal of the Diseovery of the Nile*, 1863.
- Stewart, C., *The History of Bengal*, 1813.
- Stigand, C. H., *The Land of Zing*, 1913.
- Stuhlmann, F., *Beitrag zur Kulturgeschichte von Ostafrika*, 1909.

- Sykes, P., *A History of Persia*, 1951.
- Takla Tsadeq Makuria, *Ya Ityopya Tarik*, 1959.
- Tellez, B., *The Travels of the Jesuits in Ethiopia*, 1710.
- Thomas, E., *Chronicles of the Parthian Kings*, 1871.
- Thomson, J. O., *History of Ancient Geography*, 1948.
- Trimingham, J. S., *Islam in Ethiopia*, 1952.
- United States Interdepartmental Committee on Nutrition for National Defence, *Nutrition Survey: Ethiopia*, 1959.
- Varthema : see Ludovico di Varthema.
- Vasiliev, A. A., *Justin the First*, 1950.
- Wainwright, M., *Early Foreign Trade in East Africa*, Man, 1947.
- Walker, J., *Some Coins from Kilwa*, Numismatic Chronicle, 1939;
Some New Coins from Kilwa, Tanganyika Notes and Records, 1956.
- Wansleben, J. M., *A Brief Account of the Rebellions and Bloodshed occasioned by the Anti-Christian Practices of the Jesuits in the Empire of Ethiopia*, 1679.
- Warmington, E. H., *The Commerce between the Roman Empire and India*, 1928.
- Watt, W. M., *Muhammad at Mecca*, 1953.
- Whiteway, R. S., *The Portuguese Expedition to Abyssinia in 1541-1543*, 1902.
- Wiet, G., *Les Relations Egypto-Abyssines sous les Sultans Mam-louks*, Bulletin de la Société d'Archéologie Copte, 1938.
- Wright, W., *Catalogue of the Ethiopic Manuscripts in the British Museum*, 1877.
- Wylde, A. B., *Modern Abyssinia*, 1901.
- Zinsser, H., *Rats, Lice and History*, 1960.
- Zorzi: see *Ethiopian Itineraries*.

Index

- Aadete, 196
 Abafazem, 204
 Abai: see Nile, Blue
 Abargale, 110, 186, 191n
 Abaya, Lake, 79
 Abba Alkeo, 29
 Abba Salama, 35
 Abbas, Governor, 25
 Abd al Kadar, 335
 Abdal Muttalib, 49
 Abd al Rahman, 50
 Abd Allah, 105, 335
 Abd el Kerim, 275, 298, 395
 Abd el Moal, 349
 Abiad, 211
 Abraha, ancestor of Pushkin, 377, 423-6
 Abraha, Governor of S. Arabia, 34, 47-8, 238
 Abram, 100, 103, 130, 154-6, 172
 Abrigima, 230-1
 Abu al Misk Kafur, 382
 Abu Bakr ibn Mohamed, 76
 Abu Mohamed Umara, 381
 Abu Salih, 265
 Abul Fida, 349-50
 Abul Jais ibn Ziyad, 381
 Abuna, 63-4, 102, 111, 131, 133, 187, 197-8, 335, 353
 Acannae, 20, 22
 Acant, 350
 Acel, 204
 Adakshat, 120
 Adal, 61, 65-7, 73-5, 79-80, 85, 104-5, 108-9, 243, 269, 309, 312-3, 374-6
 Addergey, 192
 Aden, 13, 65, 311, 339, 348-51, 356-8, 360, 366, 371, 376, 381
 Adowa, 191, 193, 197, 201, 240, 288, 305, 335, 406
 Adulis, 8, 10, 17-18, 22-3, 25-6, 33n, 35-9, 45, 54
 Aedesius, 33-4
 Aela, 23, 45
 Aelius Gallus, 12
 Afan, 29
 Afar, 61, 75, 109
 Affonso, King, 71, 269, 289, 292
 Aformasha, 116
 Agame, 161, 186-7, 214, 234
 Agao meder, 192
 Agaos, 16, 40 & n, 59, 111, 116, 126, 156-7, 161, 163, 216, 227, 294, 309
 Agapyri, 303
 Agaro, 78
 Agordat, 110n
 agriculture, 95, 117, 193, 196, 200-14, 249, 281, 392, 396, 400
 Aguezat, 29
 Ahmad b. Soliman el Mahri, 277
 Ahmad Grañ: see Grañ
 Aksum, Aksumite Empire, 16-17, 22-49, 54-5, 61, 64, 109, 129, 137, 143-7, 187, 195, 202, 224, 228, 236, 239, 243, 288, 295, 298, 308, 310, 390, 401-6
 Alafa, 187
 Alalali Islands, 19, 22
 Alalea, 326
 Alaa, 195, 198
 Alata, 274-5
 Albuquerque, A. d', 74, 93, 100, 107, 270, 313, 316, 347, 356, 375, 395
 Aleppo, 357
 Alexandria, 10, 23, 36, 71-2, 291, 357, 366
 Ali b. Daud, 80, 267
 Ali, Haji, 101, 302, 319
 Aliu Amba, 267, 313
 Almeida, M. d', 79n, 96-7 & n, 110-4 & n, 123-5 & n, 127 & n, 131, 134 & n, 138-9 & n, 144 & n, 160 & n, 164-5 & n, 166-7 & n, 169-70 & n, 177 & n, 184-9 & n, 197, 200-2 & n, 205-6 & n, 208-9 & n, 213-4 & n, 216-8 & n, 221 & n, 228-9 & n, 235-6, 239, 244-6 & n, 250-2 & n, 255-8 & n, 261 & n, 264-5 & n, 272-7 & n, 285-7 & n, 295 & n, 297 & n, 314 & n, 316 & n, 333 & n, 339-41 & n, 345-6 & n, 396, 399n
 almonds, 35, 357
 aloes, 40, 358, 365, 367
 Alvares, F., 74-5 & n, 78n, 94-7, 100, 107-10 & n, 121-4 & n, 137-8 & n, 143-4 & n, 159-60 & n, 168n, 180-4 & n, 195-7 & n, 199-200 & n, 202 & n, 204-6 & n, 208, 210 & n, 212 & n, 214-5 & n, 216 & n, 218 & n, 221 & n, 224-6 & n, 230 & n, 234 & n, 236 & n, 241 & n, 243 & n, 245 & n, 248-9 & n, 253 & n, 260-5 & n, 272 & n, 277 & n,

Alvares, F.,—*continued*

284 & n, 291-2 & n, 295, 307-8 & n,
310 & n, 316 & n, 322 & n, 324 & n,
326 & n, 339 & n, 349 & n, 352 & n,
376 & n

Alvarez: see Alvares

amadmado, 246

Ambacel, 109, 113

Ambangest, Mount, 141

amber, 367-8

ambergris, 302, 351, 363 & n, 365-8

Amda Tseyon, Emperor, 65, 100, 210,
243

Amedamit Mountains, 116

Amhara, 58, 76, 80, 88, 105-6, 109-11,

113, 115, 121, 129, 133n, 144-6, 172,

186, 188, 200, 205, 215n, 229, 374

Amharic, 64, 78, 106, 114

ammunition, 160. See also firearms

amole: see salt currency, and money,
primitive

Anbasa Wedem, 60

Ancasha, 193

Anderson, E., 203n

Angareb, River, 157, 174, 275

Angola, 315

Angot, 80, 106, 109, 112, 114, 120, 143,

161, 185, 196, 199, 202, 204, 211-2,

215 & n, 224, 228, 230, 245, 261-2,

265, 310, 326

Ankober, 313

Annam, 268, 408

Ansach Mammo, 277

Antakyah, 162

Antalow, 114

Anthule, 305

antimony: see *kohl*

Antioch, 294

Antonio, Brother, 266

Anzani, A., 33 & n

apes, 5-6, 8, 18, 217. See also monkeys

Aphilas, King, 30, 213, 401-2

apples, 213

Aqaba, 8, 14, 23, 36, 45

Aqabe Saat, 120, 129-30

Arab Faqih, 76n, 96, 100, 141 & n,

161-2 & n, 168n, 175-6 & n, 183 & n,

206, 210 & n, 213-4 & n, 261n, 276-

7 & n, 287-8 & n, 293 & n, 308-10 & n,

313 & n, 360 & n, 376

Arababni, 105, 159, 265

Arabia, 9-10, 12-13, 19-20, 26-8, 31,

36, 49-59, 65, 72-3, 107, 114, 161-3,

182-3, 218, 238, 267, 285, 300, 302,

305-6, 308, 318, 325, 327, 336, 343,

348-9, 356-7, 360, 372, 374, 376,

378-80, 387, 389-91

Arabs, 49-57, 64, 97, 117, 210n, 247,

277, 283, 294, 306, 309, 346-7, 350,

359-60, 363-5, 370, 386, 388, 392,

395, 397

Aragon, 71, 269, 289, 292

Ares, 26-7

Arethas, St., 45

Argobbah, 61

Ariaca, 18, 21

Arkell, A. J., 29n

Arkiko, 81, 85, 94, 107, 109, 311, 322-3,

327-8, 331-3, 334-8, 340, 344-6, 360,

376, 406

Arkiko, Naib of, 154, 240, 302, 328, 332,

378-9

Armah, King, 52-4 & n, 401, 405

Armenians, 74-5, 77, 228, 271, 283, 291,

293-4, 298-300, 302-5, 359, 392

army: see soldiers

Arnaud, 294

arrows: see bows and arrows

Arsinoë, 18n, 20

Artisans: see craftsmen

Arussi, 61, 116, 290

Aser, Ras, 350

Asirgarh, 422

Asmara, 109, 127

Asrata Kristos, Abba, 325

Astar, 28

Asyut, 318

Atbara, River, 26, 117, 315, 354

Athanasius, 33-5

Atronsa Maryam, Church, 176

Atzbeha, 34

Augustus, Emperor, 12

Aurangzeb, Emperor, 85, 300

Aussa, 80, 267

Avalites, 19-20, 22-3, 363n

awide, 192

Awarari, 121

Azabo, 335

Azaj, 126-8 & n, 167, 193, 254

Azania, 21-3

Azazo, 209, 211, 213, 335, 395

Azena, 193

Azevedo, A. d', 238-9, 243, 247, 378

Azmach, 129

Babylon, 11, 22-3

Bacati, 350

Bade: see Massawa

Badeqe, 141

Badr, Hapshi, 383

Baeda Maryam, Emperor, 73, 100, 133,

212, 214, 290, 394, 397

Baetman, J., 164 & n

bagana, 283

Bagdad, 366, 380, 387

Bahraq, 376

Bahrey, 100, 168, 245, 282-3, 298

Bahnagash, 77-8, 121, 123, 148, 161,

182-4, 196, 253, 261, 322-3, 326-8,

331, 335-6

- Bahrnagash*, Country of the, 109, 113-4, 180, 186-7, 195, 249
Bajerond, 128, 130, 304
Bakaffa, Emperor, 87, 89, 99-100, 129, 151, 227, 243, 398
Bakla, 326
Balambaras, 128, 130
Balez, 191
Balgada Robel, 182
Bali, 61, 65, 76, 79, 105, 109, 159, 309, 312
Ballous, 110 & n, 126, 183, 219
bamboo, 221, 320
bananas, 212-3, 395
Bandar Hais, 20, 22
Bandar Ululah, 20, 22
Banians, 15, 298, 345
Banja, 193
Banks, J., 245
Banu Najah, 381
Banu Ziyad, 381
bar, 191 & n
Baraba, 141, 144, 309-10, 312-4
baraha, 201 & n
Barakat, Sultan, 78
Baratti, G., 97, 100, 135-6 & n, 206 & n, 226 & n, 228 & n, 377 & n
Barbak Shah, 383
barbare, 207n
Barbaria, 23, 39
Barbosa, D., 94, 100, 107 & n, 338 & n, 348, 350-1 & n, 358-9 & n, 375-6 & n, 382 & n
barelle, 343 & n
Barkhuus, A., 338n, 243 & n
Barko, 320
barley, 156, 196, 200, 202, 204-6, 208, 230, 249, 251, 348, 358
Barneto, T., 233
Barquq, 69
Barra, 143, 308
Barradas, M., 97, 100, 127, 160, 164-5, 168, 187, 197-8, 214, 218, 226, 228-9, 246, 249, 279, 286, 331, 333, 340, 346
barter, 260, 266, 307, 313
Barygaza, 21
Basha, 129 & n
Bashilo, River, 109, 111, 113, 115
Basi: see *Massawa*
basil, 205-6
Basra, 102, 381
Basset, R., 64n, 149n, 177n, 237n, 239-40n
basutos, 180-1 & n. See also *bazet*
Bati Del Wanbara, 76, 294
Batical, 358
Batta, 350
bazet, 185. See also *basutos*
beads, 6, 227, 266, 268, 315, 342, 353-4, 357-8, 367, 369, 372
beans, 202, 204-5, 367
Beber, River, 225
Beccari, C., 85n, 108n, 110n, 127-8n, 144n, 160n, 163n, 165n, 177n, 185-9n, 193n, 197-8n, 206n, 208-9n, 211-4n, 217n, 219n, 225-6n, 228n, 233-5n, 237n, 239n, 242-4n, 246-7n, 249n, 251n, 256n, 261n, 264-5n, 279n, 286n, 300-3n, 316n, 318-20n, 330-3n, 336n, 340-1n, 346n, 349n, 352n, 377-8n
Beckingham, C. F., 134n, 137n, 201-2n
Bed, 187
beds, 257-8, 396
beer, 28. See also *talla*
Begemder, 28, 64, 80, 88, 110-5, 120, 129-30, 161, 172, 183, 186-8, 210, 212, 227, 229, 233, 235, 241, 315
Beher, 28
Beilul, 108-9, 280, 312, 314, 332-3, 346
Beirut, 290
Bejas, 56-7, 218, 228
Belessa, 242
Belie: see *Beilul*
Bengal, 258, 358, 383-4, 411
Benin, 315
Bent, J. T., 16n, 24n, 47n, 56n, 143n, 153n
benzoin, 367 & n
berbera, 220 & n
Berbera, 19, 22, 107-9, 312-3, 338, 346-50, 356-60, 372
berendo, 251 & n. See also *meat*, *raw*
Bergida, 277
Berhan Zamada, 120
Bermah, 350
Bermudes, J., 77, 81, 96, 100, 160, 183, 216, 225, 229, 287, 293, 314, 360
Bernier, F., 300n
Berry, Duke of, 70
Bicini, G., 72, 291-2
Bidder, I., 62n, 269n
Bilal, 55, 380, 384
Birch, W. de G., 74n, 107n, 315-6n, 325n, 348n, 356n, 259
birchigo, 268
Bitwaded, 121 & n, 125, 129-30, 180-2, 193, 328
Bizamo, 88, 109, 111-2
Bizen, 109, 195-8, 202, 212, 215, 326
blacksmiths, 286-7, 392-3
Blattengeta, 126 & n, 304
Blemmyes, 37, 48
Blue Nile: see *Nile*, *Blue*
Blundell, H. W., 132n, 163n, 178n, 193n, 195n, 198n, 210n, 220n, 237n, 247n
boars, 220
boats, ships, etc., 3-10, 12-14, 17, 21, 26, 39, 45, 54, 56, 59, 72-3, 77, 225, 227-8, 282, 293, 304, 311, 318-9, 322-3, 325, 340-1, 343, 345-6, 348,

- boats, ships, etc.—*continued*
 350-1, 359, 369, 377, 389, 397-8
bofeta, 256
bolota, 164 & n
 bows and arrows, 159, 161-3, 165, 173,
 293, 351, 363-4
 bracelets, 6, 18, 220, 343, 353
 Braga, Archbishop of, 159
 Brancalone, F. and N., 70, 289-91, 397
 Branti, River, 116
 brass, 353
 brass wire, 353
 Brava, 21-2, 59, 314, 338, 352, 358-9,
 365, 367-8, 371-2, 375
 brazilwood, 357
 bread, 138, 196, 248, 279-80, 307. See
 also *injera*
 Breasted, J. H., 4-5n, 8n
 Brevedent, C. F. X., 101, 319
 bridges, 157, 225, 272, 274-6, 298, 395
 Bruce, J., 12-14 & n, 18, 30, 32, 62n,
 63-5 & n, 70n, 73-5 & n, 78n, 81n,
 83 & n, 89, 100, 102-3, 113-8 & n, 127n,
 129-32 & n, 134n, 136 & n, 142 & n,
 146-9 & n, 152-8 & n, 162-3 & n, 170-
 4 & n, 180 & n, 185n, 191-3 & n, 196-
 8 & n, 201 & n, 206 & n, 208-11 & n,
 213-4 & n, 217-22 & n, 226-7 & n,
 229 & n, 234-7 & n, 239-47 & n,
 243 & n, 251 & n, 258 & n, 264-6 & n,
 268-9 & n, 271 & n, 274 & n, 281n,
 286-8 & n, 291 & n, 294n, 302n,
 304-5 & n, 311-2 & n, 315 & n, 321n,
 326-9 & n, 331 & n, 336 & n, 341 & n,
 343 & n, 345 & n, 354-5 & n, 360-1n,
 374 & n, 378-9 & n, 399 & n
 Brulhe, 88
 Brusca, 318
 Budge, E. A. W., 4n, 9n, 17n, 28n, 30n,
 33n, 44n, 52-4n, 57n, 60n, 62n, 64n,
 68n, 70n, 78n, 82-3n, 85n, 87n,
 164 & n, 236n, 238-40n, 247n, 269n,
 289n, 302n, 317 & n, 327n, 336n
 buffalo hides, 169, 171, 344
 buffaloes, 216 & n, 363
 Bugia, 307
 building, 296, 389, 398
 Bulicas, 39
 Bulla, 121
 Bur, 187, 234, 346
 Burma, 358
 Burton, R., 210n
 Bury, J. B., 47n
 Burye, 116, 227
 butter, 21, 156, 179, 187, 193, 249, 338,
 344, 348, 354
 Buxton, D. R., 62n, 277n
 cabbages, 206
caera, 265
 Cafres, 110-2 & n, 126, 224-5
 Caina, 195
 Cairo, 11, 23, 63, 67, 71, 154-5, 212,
 269-70, 289, 291, 301-2, 304, 307,
 316-7, 320, 324-5, 334-5, 348-9, 352,
 357, 359-60, 378-9
 Calicut, 359-60
 Cambay, 255, 258, 298, 313-4, 350-1,
 356-8, 366
 camels, 9, 29, 48, 182, 312-3, 319, 325,
 338, 347, 349, 351, 363, 365, 367-8
candelabra euphorbia, 31, 223
 capitals, fixed, 86, 141-2, 399
 capitals, moving, 86, 95, 101, 137-40,
 146, 152, 399
 caps, 254, 257, 295
 cardamum, 315
 Carignano, G. da, 68-9, 93, 100, 104
 carpenters: see craftsmen
 carpets, 305, 334
 Castanhoso, M. de, 77, 96, 100, 162-3,
 205, 214, 224, 253, 272, 283
 Castille, 71, 324
 Castro, J. de, 96, 100, 109-10 & n, 326,
 338, 378, 384
 Catalans, 161, 290, 292
 cattle, 7, 28, 40, 111, 114, 116-8, 121,
 135, 156, 161, 169-70, 176, 180, 183-4,
 188, 190, 193, 195, 215-8, 225, 234,
 246, 274, 285, 307, 320-1, 329, 336,
 338, 345, 348-9, 362, 365, 368
 Cerulli, E., 60n, 68n
 Ceylon, 36-7, 268, 358, 366, 383, 389,
 400, 411
 Chagassa, 156, 158
chagwara, 251n
 Chancora, 144
chat, 208, 210
 Chau Ju-Kua, 363, 365, 386
 Chaul, 358
 cheese, 156
 cheetahs, 217
 Chelga, 117, 316, 320, 354
 Cherkin, 117, 219, 321, 354-5
 chickens, 115, 216, 307
 chickpeas, 200, 202, 206
 China, 10, 47, 70, 94, 97, 258, 268, 282,
 300, 358, 362-71, 380, 386-7, 407-8
 chinaware, 184, 367-8
 Chinese, 33, 97, 362-71, 387, 411
 cholera, 239
choqe, 201 & n
 Chou Chu Fei, 363-4
 Christianity, 29, 33-6, 51-3, 55, 60-2,
 65-7, 70, 72, 76-8, 107, 164, 379,
 389-91
 Christians, 104-5, 161-2, 171, 175-6,
 188, 211, 243, 248, 284-5, 288, 302,
 312-4, 322-3, 325, 374-5, 379, 382,
 392

- Church land, 63-4, 95, 131, 183, 193-8,
 320, 400
 Church schools, 95, 199. See also educa-
 tion
 Churches, 154, 176, 199, 229, 295, 297-8,
 308, 325
 Chu-ssu-pen, 365
 cinnamon, 6-7, 20-3, 39-40n
 citrons, 212-3, 315
 civet, 217 & n, 219, 302, 315, 320, 344-5,
 360, 364
 Claudius, Emperor, 13
 Claudius Ptolemaeus: see Ptolemy the
 Geographer
 Clement VII, Pope, 82
 clergy: see priests
 cloaks, 18, 20, 254-5, 328
 cloth, 18-19 & n, 21, 136, 166, 180, 182,
 184-5, 187, 189-90, 192-3, 195,
 223-5, 255, 257-9, 284-5, 288, 308,
 311, 313, 315, 321-2, 340, 342, 345,
 351, 356-8, 365, 367, 372. See also
 clothing, textiles, etc.
 cloth currency, 179, 266, 288. See also
 money, primitive
 clothes, washing of, 135.
 clothing, 95, 137, 158, 253-9, 281,
 362-3, 398
 cloves, 340, 357, 367
 clubs, 164 & n, 169
 Clysmā, 11, 45
 coffee, 208, 210-11, 243-4
 Coga, 140
 coins, Aksumite, 30-3, 57-8, 389-90,
 401-5
 coins, Chinese, 265, 268, 370-4, 407-8
 coins, Harari, 267 & n
 coins, Mogadishu, 268
 coins, other, 18, 20, 22, 260-8 & n, 313,
 408
 Cola, 167
 Coloe, 17, 22-3
 Colombo, 383
 Combes, E., and Tamisier, M., 275n
 Congo, 261, 265n, 316
 Constantinople, 71, 268, 298, 307n,
 327, 378-9, 393
 Constantius, Emperor, 35
 Conti, N. de, 350
 Conti Rossini, C., 3n, 7-8 & n, 12n, 26-
 8 & n, 30-1 & n, 35-6 & n, 44n, 47-9n,
 54-8 & n, 61n, 64n, 141n, 175n,
 178n, 184n, 186n, 195 & n, 328n, 377n
 Couzelman, W. E., 76n, 78n, 141n,
 162-3n, 176n, 178n, 180n, 183n, 205n,
 237n, 294n, 309n, 327n
 copper, 8, 18, 20, 22, 28, 227, 292, 343,
 357, 365
 Copts, 62, 283, 289, 311, 353
 Corbeta, 144
 Corcoro, 262
 Coriander, 204, 206
 corn, 190, 202, 235, 282
 cornelian, 357 & n
 Corsali, A., 94, 100, 138, 310, 312, 325,
 338, 348, 356, 360, 375
 Cosmas, 10, 12n, 25 & n, 27 & n, 36-
 44 & n, 225, 260, 359
 cotton, 14, 18, 21, 30, 83, 157, 180 & n,
 187, 193, 208, 211-2, 255, 258-9, 278,
 309, 321, 342, 354, 356, 365
 Coulbeaux, J. B., 62n
 counter-irritants, 246
 Coupland, R., 3n, 59n, 85-6 & n, 351n,
 372 & n, 381n, 385-7 & n
 Couto, D. do, 265 & n
 Covilham, P. de, 29, 72, 228
 craftsmen, 62, 157, 278, 283-4, 289,
 292-3, 295, 298-301, 391-3, 395
 Crawford, O. G. S., 71, 93, 106 & n, 141,
 144, 204, 215n, 219n, 290, 309-10n,
 313-4n, 354n
 crop yields, 204, 206-7, 235
cruzado 185
 crystal, 357
cuba, 398
 Curle, A. T., 369 & n
 currency: see coins and money, primitive
 customs posts, 87, 188-91 & n, 264, 305,
 328, 336, 391. See also taxation
 Cyeneum, 17, 22
 Cyrenaica, 293
 Dabaina Arabs, 355
 Dabaz, 150
 Daber, 111
dabtaras, 199n, 282
 Dabul, 258
daga, 201, 237
 Dagore, 336
dagusa, 202 & n, 204, 206, 208, 249
 Dagusa, 189, 272
dahab, 268
 Dahalak Islands, 19, 22, 56, 58-9, 75,
 291, 300, 323, 325-6, 338-9, 343,
 349, 358-9, 372, 381
Dajazmach, 129
dal chawa, 128
 Damascus, 357
 Dambea, 109-10, 112, 116, 123 & n,
 129-30, 146, 156, 186-8, 197-8, 205,
 214, 219, 233, 235-6, 242, 256, 263,
 277, 297
 Damot, 106 & n, 108-9, 116, 120-1, 157,
 192, 205, 224-7, 239, 263 & n, 288,
 309, 376
 Dancaz, 109-10, 138-40, 209, 211, 298
 Dankali area and people, 9, 80, 108, 110,
 112, 233, 261, 264-5, 311-2, 315, 330,
 332-3, 346

- Dara, 105, 109-11, 159, 188, 191n
 Darghat, 191
 Darius, King, 10
 Dasek, 120 & n
 dates, 346, 357-8
 Dawaro, 61, 65, 72, 76, 79, 81, 105, 121, 159, 210, 214
 Dawit I, Emperor, 69, 251, 269
 Dawit III, Emperor, 100, 150-1, 240
 Dawlah al Hamdani, 383
 Debaroa, 143-7, 230, 326-7, 336, 339, 406
 Debra Berhan, 109, 141, 247
 Debra Damo, 60, 133 & n, 247, 327
 Debra Libanos, 62-3, 115, 205
 Decamin, 291, 322
 Deccan, 357, 413-22
 De Cosson, E. A., 248n
 Decuma, 246
 deer, 215, 217, 220, 368
 Defalo, 330, 333
 Degalhan, 76
 Del Naad, King, 60-1
 Demetrius, 301
 Demetros, 277
 Dengla, 193
denguelet, 246
dennich, 206
 Dequin, 219 & n, 316
 Derho, Amba, 326
 Deutsche Aksum-Expedition, 24, 27-8 & n
 Devic, L. M., 347n, 350-1n
 Dhu Iazan, 45
 Dhu Nuwas, 45
 Diab, 106
 Dias, A., 294
 Dias, B., 72
 Digsa, 147, 191, 219, 379
 dill, 206
 Dillmann, A., 27 & n
 Dindorf, L., 47n
 Dingleber, 109, 116, 191
 Dinguel, 310
 Diodorus Island, 17
 Dioscorides, 23, 37
 diseases, 95, 238-45, 318, 400
 Dissei Island, 17
 Diu, 72, 258, 298, 340, 356
diwani, 268
 Dixan: see Digsa
 Doba, 109-10, 335-6
 dogs, 183, 215, 217, 354
 Domitian, Emperor, 19
 Dongola, 316, 318-9, 354
 donkeys, 9, 176, 190-1, 215-6 & n, 237, 263-4, 272, 397
 Dori, 121
 Dozy, R., and Goeje, M. J. d', 347n, 381n
 dragon's blood, 358 & n, 365 & n, 367
 dragon's saliva, 368
drum, 184 & n
 Dreedda, 115, 315
 Drewes, A. J., 267
 drink, 251-2
 drums, 63, 166, 182
 Duala Bairen, 28
 Dufar, 349
 Dukam, River, 141
 Durbit, 309
 durra, 203n, 344
 Dutch, 311, 370
 Dutch East Indies, 300, 302-3
 Duyvendak, J. J. L., 364-5n, 367 & n, 370, 386-7n
 dyes, 40, 206, 242, 258, 340, 360

 ebony, 4, 68, 351
 Edd, 326
 Eddir, 176
 education, 81, 95, 199, 299, 302, 392, 396, 400
 Egypt, 3-8, 10, 12, 23, 26, 33, 36, 62, 69, 105, 182-3, 201, 206, 218, 228, 269-71, 289, 293, 298, 302-3, 305, 308, 316, 325, 327, 332, 353, 362, 370, 372, 376, 380, 382-3, 389, 391
 Egyptians, 71, 97, 180, 271, 277, 283, 298, 304, 311, 316, 353, 356, 392-5 & n
 Elabaha, 29
 Elanitic Gulf: see Aqaba
 Eleni, Empress, 72, 74-5, 291
 elephant hides, 344
 Elephant, River, 20
 elephants, 10, 12, 17-18, 37, 41-2, 47-8 & n, 117, 215, 217, 220
 Elizabeth, Empress, 383
 Ella Atsbeha: see Kaleb
 emeralds, 37. See also precious stones
 Emfras, 156, 158, 219, 223, 288, 311, 406
 Emperors, powers of, 89, 119-32, 136, 399
 Enarea, 105, 109, 112, 117-8, 164, 185, 209, 219, 225-6, 263, 265, 315, 378-9
 Enderta, 109, 114, 186-7, 190-1 & n, 214
endod, 221 & n
 Andreas Eshete, 197
 Endreyas, Monk, 374
 Endybis, King, 30, 401-2
 English, 304, 311, 370
 Entoto, 109
 epidemics, 99, 238-40
 Ernestus, Duke, 299
 Esat Welleg, 277
esa-zawe, 246
 Eskander, Emperor, 176, 289
 Eson, 144
 Ethiopic, 27, 35-6
 eunuchs, 128, 374

- Evetts, B. T. A., 265n
 eye-cosmetic, 6-7. See also *kohl*
 eye diseases
 Ezana, King, 28-31 & n, 34-5, 401-2
 Ezion-geber, 8

 Fakhr ad Dowla, 289
 Falashas, 114, 153-4, 157, 283-4, 286-7,
 392
 famines, 79, 99, 157, 205, 233-7, 239,
 392
fangel, 239
 Fantsahat, 29
 Faraj el Funi, Haji, 374
 Farasan, 45
farenteit, 244
 Farso, 204, 208, 216
 Fartak, 357
 Fasiladas, Emperor, 84 & n, 86, 99-100,
 113, 135, 149-51, 157, 185, 239,
 258, 275, 299, 399
 fasts, 248-9, 374
 Fatajar, 61, 65, 79, 109, 121, 176, 205,
 290
fateha, 363n
 Fazuklo, 117, 225
 Fei Hsein, 368
 Felipe II, King, 284, 314
 Felipe III, King, 82, 295, 334
 fennel, 206
 Fernandes, A., 77
Fetha Nagast, 119 & n, 372-3, 391, 399
 fevers, 241-2
 Fez, 307, 324
 figs, 212-3 & n
 Finlay, L., 62n
 firearms, 76, 87-8, 114, 150, 159-65 & n,
 170-3, 272-3, 297, 300-1, 304-5,
 326, 329, 345, 352, 375-6, 394, 397
 fish, 210, 347, 358, 368
Fitaurari, 128, 130, 166
 flax, 211
 Fleming, J., 97n, 113n, 142n, 170n,
 185n, 199n, 273n, 285n, 299n, 302n,
 311n
 Florence, Council of, 70
 Fogera, 115, 156
 food, 157-8, 208-9, 248-51, 281
 foreigners, 96, 123, 289, 306. See also
 Armenians, Greeks, Franks, etc.
 Foresti, J., 69
 forests, 139, 221-3
 France, 99, 101, 303, 324, 353, 359, 392
 frankincense, 13, 20-2, 39-40, 221, 311,
 351, 365, 367-9
 Frankincense Country, 26, 39-40
 Franks, 283, 289-306, 392, 395. See also
 foreigners
frasula, 344n

 Freeman-Grenville, G. P. S., 268n,
 370 & n
 Fremona, 84, 146, 150, 206, 228, 233,
 241, 295, 297
 French, 294
 friars, 196, 308, 326
 fruit, 196, 206, 208, 213, 348-9, 351,
 357, 394-5
 Frumentius, 33-5
 Fugaym, 47
 Funchos, 219
 Fung, 317
gabars, 155, 168, 179, 193, 230, 280, 283,
 293
 Gabaza, 29
 Gabra Masqal, King, 46
 Gabra Wald Ingida Worq, 155n
 Gabre Sellassie, 123n, 248n, 275n
 Gafat, 109, 116, 117n
 Gafates, 81, 185, 216, 225
 Galawdewos, Emperor, 77-9, 81, 83n, 96,
 100, 134, 141, 149, 162, 205, 293-4,
 327, 396, 399
 Galila, 277
 Gallas, 79-80, 82-3, 87-8, 96, 110-2,
 114-7, 140, 150, 163, 165, 168, 170-2,
 177, 184-6 & n, 197-8, 209-10, 216,
 235, 239, 241, 245, 274-5, 282-3, 286,
 312-5, 333, 343-4, 347, 398-9
 Galvan, D., 75
 Gama, C. da, 77-8, 162, 241, 326
 Gama, V. da, 72, 77, 351
 Gambela, 203n
 Gamez, 45
 Gamo, 96, 109
 Gan, 80, 120, 161, 215
 Ganget, 215
 Ganjaz, 117
 Ganz, 109, 111
 Garad, 121
 Garima, Abba, 183, 197, 233
 garlic, 204, 206
 Garneau, 294
 Gaudefroy-Demombynes, 65n, 105n,
 120n, 159-60n, 200n, 209-10n, 214-
 5n, 224n, 227-8n, 238n, 248n, 253n,
 265-6n, 289n, 374n
 gazelles, 217, 345
 Geda, 215
 Gedom, 109, 120, 215
 Genasere, 313
 Gendebel, 176, 267, 313
 Genoa, 69, 100
 Genoese, 69, 290, 292
 George, King, 60
 Georgia, 293
 Gersem, King, 32, 61, 401, 405
 Geshen, Amba, 109, 112-3, 133-5 & n,
 221, 422
 Geshen, River, 115

- Gibbon, E., 47n, 390
 Gibe, River, 80, 106n, 275
 Giesim, 212, 319
 ginger, 213, 315
 Gingero, 109, 112, 275, 377
 Giovannino of Verona, 269
 giraffes, 43-4, 215, 220, 264, 367 & n
 Girana, 280, 319-20
 Girri, 161
 Giyorgis, 277
 glass, 18 & n, 22, 268, 343, 358, 369
 glassware, 353
 goats, 156, 176, 215, 217, 256, 279, 338, 344-5
 Gojam, 109-11, 113, 115-6, 120, 129, 161, 180-1, 185-8 & n, 192, 197, 201n, 212, 218, 224, 226, 233-6, 256, 263, 275, 294, 309
 gold, 4, 6-9, 12, 18, 22, 28, 30, 32, 40-1, 47, 105, 136, 156, 179-81 & n, 183-7, 190, 192-3, 197-8 & n, 224-7, 255, 260-1, 265, 292-3, 300, 302, 305, 307-10, 313, 315, 320, 324, 327-8, 335, 338-9 & n, 341, 343-5, 347-8, 350, 352, 355-60, 365, 367-8
 goldsmiths, 286, 292
 Gomes, J., 291
 Gondar, 85-9, 99, 101-3, 113, 128-30, 142, 147-58, 172-3, 196, 198, 209-10, 214, 221, 227, 234, 236, 238, 240, 243, 247, 265, 280, 286-8, 299, 302-4, 306, 311, 317-8, 320, 335-6, 343 & n, 379, 395, 399-400, 406
 Gongas, 116-7, 126, 185
 Good Hope, Cape of, 360-1
 Gorgora, 109-10, 140, 239, 243, 295-8
gosh, 216 & n
 Goutto, 116, 209
 Gradini, T., 291
 grain, 160, 183, 202, 207, 349, 369
 Gralta, 160, 187, 191n
 Grañ, Ahmad, 78-9, 81, 95-6, 100, 120, 134, 141, 145, 149, 160-3, 168 & n, 175-7, 183-4, 205, 210, 214, 224, 248n, 260, 272, 276-7, 283, 288, 293-5, 307-8, 310, 313, 339, 347, 358, 360, 364, 376, 394, 397-8
 grapes, 212, 249, 395
Grazmach, 128, 130
 Greece, 293, 376
 Greek fire, 389 & n
 Greeks, 10, 16, 32, 34, 36, 54, 102, 153-4, 277, 283, 292, 301, 303-5, 335-6, 392, 398
 Gregory, 98, 100, 112-3, 168, 170, 178, 185, 190, 199, 217, 235, 246, 273, 285-6, 299
 Grunebaum, G. E. von, 382n
 Guardafui, Cape, 20, 22, 107, 313, 326, 328, 350, 356, 360
 Gubas, 117, 146
 Gudit, 60, 133. See also Yodit
 Gudru, 239
 Guendra, 140
 Guerri, 319
 Guesgue, 192
 Gugsu Guangul, Ras, 132
 Guidi, I., 99, 114, 119n, 128n, 149n, 150n, 152-3n, 171n, 174n, 178n, 191-3n, 212, 234, 237n, 239-40n, 264 & n, 278n, 288n, 300n, 304n, 334n, 336n, 373n, 378n
 Guilans, 359
 Guillain, M., 9n, 16n, 21n, 59n, 347n
 Gujerat, 298
 Gujeratis, 322, 359, 365
gult, 179, 197-8
 Gult, River, 116
 gums, 4, 20, 22, 223, 363
gunfun, 240
 gunpowder, 160, 165
 gunsmiths, 293
 Gura, 58n
 Gurage, area and people, 58 & n, 76, 112, 164, 184, 203n, 212, 288, 314
 Guzara, 142, 294, 297
 Habab, 20
 Habash, 55 & n
 Habashat, 55n
 Habesh Khan, 383
 Habshis, 383-4, 409-22
 Hadani, 60
 Hadawi, 148, 406
 Hadramaut, 357
 Hadya, 61, 65, 76, 105, 108-9, 121, 159, 183, 265, 274
 Hafuni, 350
 Haile Sellassie I, Emperor, 393
 Haiq, Lake, 213-4, 276-7
 hair, 256-7
 Hakim of Egypt, 62
hakuna, 265
 Halai, 32, 218
 Halevy, J., 164n
 Hamalmal, 79
 Hamar, 278
 Hamasha, 29
 Hamasien, 8, 57, 106, 109, 113, 123n, 219, 234, 325-5, 329, 334
 Hamasu, 8
 Hamdadid, 383
 Hamid Ali, 335
hamot, 25
hanzeer, 244
 Hapshis: see Habshis
 Harar, 58 & n, 61, 75-6, 79-80, 108, 203n, 210, 236, 239, 260, 267 & n, 313, 327

- hares, 215, 217, 345
harf, 268
 Harff, A. von, 71, 100, 270 & n
 Harith: see Arethas, St.
 Harris, C., 26n, 221n, 388n
 Hassan, b. Ahmad el Haimi, 99, 149, 170, 280, 312
 Hassan el Basri, 162
 Hastings, J., 9n
 Hataz, King, 61, 401, 405
 hatchets, 22
 hats, 182
 Hatshepsut, Queen, 4-7
 Hawara, 32
 Hawash, River, 80, 109, 162, 175, 290, 293, 309n, 397
 Hazin, El, 21
 Hazorta, 336
 Heiling, P., 299, 396
 Hellenism, 26-7, 32, 45, 55, 389
 helmets, 159, 165, 170
hena, 248
 Henry the Navigator, Prince, 72, 386
 herbs, 202, 205, 356
 Hermann, A., 362
 hides, 156, 169, 171-2, 190, 227, 258, 274, 315, 341
 Hijaz, 49, 54, 74, 347
hijra, 50 & n
 Himyar, 28
 Himyarites, 13, 37, 39, 44-8. See also Homerites
hina, 248 & n
 hippopotamus hides, 18, 22
 hippopotamus teeth, 44
 hippopotamuses, 42, 217
 Hiram, King, 8
 Hirth, F., and Rockhill, W. W., 363-5 & n
 Hitti, P., 46 & n, 48n, 54-5 & n, 38on, 383 & n
 Hobat, 61
 Hodeida, 285, 343
 Hodgkin, T., 149n
 Holeca: see Walaqa
 Holy War, 176-7. See also *jihad*
 Homerites, 37, 45. See also Himyarites
 honey, 111, 156, 158, 166, 179, 186-7, 192-3, 196, 208, 214, 321, 338, 341, 344, 348, 350-2, 354, 357-8, 368, 376
 Hormuz, 366
 horses, 30n, 104, 117, 138, 159, 161-6 & n, 168-70, 172-3, 179-85, 187, 190, 195-6, 215-8 & n, 327, 288, 309, 319, 322, 348, 350-2, 354, 357-8, 368, 376
 hospitality, 177-8, 278-80, 320, 351
 Hourani, A., 9-10 & n, 12n, 37 & n, 47n
 housing, 143-7, 149, 152-3, 155, 295-6, 320, 339, 341, 345, 348, 351, 372, 396
 hunting, 137
 Huntingford, G. W. B., 137, 201n, 397
 Hyatt, H. M., 81n
 hyenas, 152, 217, 264
 Iathlia, King, 57, 401, 404
 Ibaba, 147
 Ibn al Amid, 269
 Ibn al Assal, 119, 373
 Ibn al Wardi, 347
 Ibn Battuta, 69, 93, 100, 347 & n, 351 & n, 356, 372, 383, 387
 Ibn Fadl Allah, 65, 69, 93, 100, 121, 159, 200, 209-10, 212, 214, 224, 227-8, 265-6, 374
 Ibn Hawkal, 59-60, 381
 Ibn Hisham, 51
 Ibn Najah, 381
 Ibn Said, 347, 349-50
 Ibn Sultan, 382
 Ibn Ziyad, 58
 Ibrahim, ancestor of Pushkin, 377, 423-6
 Idrissi, 104, 347, 350, 372, 381
 Ifag, 157
 Ifat, 61, 64-5, 69, 105, 120-1, 159, 224, 266
 Imolo, B. da, 72
 Imrolkais, 350
 incense, 4, 6, 20, 266, 277, 307, 315, 349, 360, 364, 368
 India, 9-10, 12-14, 18n, 21-2, 25, 36-7, 39, 45-6, 55, 68, 70, 72, 75, 84-5, 93, 145, 167, 169n, 182, 203, 213, 255-6, 258-9, 275, 282, 291, 298, 302-3, 305, 307-9, 313, 322, 325, 331, 340, 348-9, 355, 357-8, 361-2, 372, 376, 378-80, 383, 385, 392, 409-22
 Indians, 14-16, 46-7, 97, 139, 145, 149, 162, 241, 275, 293, 298-300, 322, 341, 345, 356, 360, 370, 395
 indigo, 357
 Indonesia, 203n
 influenza, 239-40
injera, 157-8, 250-1, 279. See also bread
inkoy, 246
 Iotabe, 45
 Iraq, 105
 iron, 8-9, 18, 20, 22, 30, 39-40 & n, 115, 170-2, 200, 225, 227-9, 260, 272, 286, 292, 347, 353, 367, 372
 iron currency, 32, 40, 265 & n
 irrigation, 204
 Isfahan, 291
 Isis, 20
 Islam, 49-55, 61, 65-8, 70, 72, 76, 78, 104-5, 107, 117, 394, 390
 Italians, 289-91
 ivory, 6-8, 15, 17, 19, 22, 47, 114, 156, 189, 215, 220, 341, 344-5, 348-52, 355, 358-60, 364-9

- Iyasu I, Emperor, 87, 99-101, 128-30, 136, 150-1, 155, 171, 190, 231, 239, 300-3, 317, 334, 392, 399-400
 Iyasu II, Emperor, 87-8, 99-100, 150, 153-4, 192, 213, 220, 240, 287, 304, 335, 354, 395
 Iyoas, Emperor, 88, 99, 157, 192, 227, 240, 304

jabartis, 153 & n, 286, 306, 320
 jackals, 217
 Jafar b. Ali Talib, 51-4
 Jalal ud din Yaqut, 383
jalba, 278, 325, 345
jan haisana, 282
jan maasare, 282
 Janjira, 384
 Janni, 102, 305, 335-6
 Jarad Abun, 72
 Java, 366
 Jawi, 344
 Jebel Zakur, 375
 Jeddah, 49, 56, 266, 285, 292, 302, 304, 307, 310, 318, 324, 327, 335-6, 339, 343, 347, 349, 355-6, 358, 375, 392
 Jerusalem, 9, 46, 62, 65-8, 70-1, 93, 155, 269-70 & n, 291, 324-5, 332, 394
 Jesman, C., 383 & n
 Jesuits, 81-6, 96-101, 110, 146, 160, 170-1, 185, 233-4, 271, 297-9, 304, 306, 330-1, 367, 377, 396
 Jews, 127, 174, 298. See also Falashas
 Jidaya, 61
jiḥad, 54-5, 59, 74-5. See also Holy War
 Jimma, 203n
 João, II, King, 72
 João III, King, 292, 294, 299, 378
 Joel, King, 32
 John, Brother, 72
 Johnston, C., 388n
 Jones, W., 100, 103, 115n, 130 & n, 154-6, 173 & n
 Jordanus, Brother, 70
 Juah, 350
 Juba River and area, 79, 314, 364, 368-9
 Jubbah, 61
 Judaism, 45, 59, 61, 389
 Judith, 60
 justice, 96, 121-2, 127
 Justinian, Emperor, 46
 Justinus, Emperor, 44-6

kabab, 239
 Kabar, 57-8 & n
 Kabith, 381
 Kaffa, 26n, 315
 Kaha, River, 155, 157, 174, 275-6
Kaimakan, 345
 Kaleb, King, 25, 27, 44-6, 401, 403
 Kamaran, Bay, 375
 Kammerer, A., 30, 32 & n, 56n, & n 78, 110n, 326-7 & n, 339
kantara, 239
Kantiba, 123 & n, 198
kantuffa 174 & n
Kanyazmach, 128, 130
 Karoota, 115, 156, 315
 Kasmati Waragna, 87-8
 Kasu, 29
 Kay, H. C., 381n
Kebra Nagast, 9, 64-5
 Kekia 345 & n. See also Quequea
kella, 192 & n, 266. See also customs posts
 Keller, C., 8n
 Kelti, River, 116
 Kemalke, 30
kemis, 342
 Keneh, 325
 Kenya, 22, 369
 Khaded b. Zaid, 53
 Khorasanians, 359
kibeer, 268
 Kilwa, 59, 314n, 357-9, 365, 372
 Kirkman, J. S., 369-70 & n
 knives, 182
 Kohaito, 17, 22, 24
kohl, 315, 340, 343, 353
 Konfodah, 343
Koran, 48, 52, 54, 238
 Koseir, 325
kosso, 221-2 & n, 244-5
 Krapf, J. L., 9 & n
 Krencker, D., 24, 43-4
 Krestodoulos, Abuna, 154, 334
 Kristos, Alaqa, 278
 Kuang-yu-tu, 365
 Kuara, 109, 116-7, 227, 242-3, 246, 258, 316

labalb, 239
labati, 247
 labour, division of, 166, 251, 281-8, 391
 La Brocquière, B. de, 70, 165
 lacquered ware, 365
laden, 237 & n
 Lalibela, 62 & n, 86, 100, 109, 129, 143, 145, 266, 298, 390
 Lalibela, King, 62, 269 & n
 Lalmalmon, 189 & n, 192, 228, 239, 272
 Lamaisse, E. and Dujarric, G., 54n
 Lamu, 59
 land tenure, 123-4, 130-2, 155, 160, 167-8, 179-98, 293-4, 297, 391-2, 399-400
 Lane-Poole, S., 71
 Lasta, 61, 63-4 & n, 76, 109-10, 114-5, 172, 192, 269
 Lavoix, L., 290n
 lead, 229 & n, 292

- Lebna Dengel, Emperor, 72-4, 76-7,
 94 & n, 96, 100, 108, 133, 159, 180,
 292, 299, 324, 349, 375, 397
 Lefevre, T., and others, 344n
 legal system, 119-32
 lemons, 212-3, 345
 lentils, 158, 200, 202, 204, 206
 leopards, 184, 215, 367-8
 leprosy, 243
 Leuce Come, 12, 26
 Levant, 259, 356
 Levine, D., 394n
 lice, 238
 Lima, R. di, 74
 Linchoten, J., 385
 linen, 255
 lions, 138-9, 184, 215, 217, 220, 367-8
Liqamakwas, 128
 Littmann, E., 24, 28-9 & n, 30n, 43, 45n
 livestock, 179, 215-9, 348
 Lobo, J., 85n, 97 & n, 100 & n, 168 & n,
 190 & n, 209 & n, 233 & n, 241 & n,
 250 & n, 252 & n, 254-5 & n, 257 & n,
 263 & n, 273-5 & n, 280 & n, 314-
 5 & n, 333 & n
 locusts, 204, 230-5, 237
 Loheia, 343
 Longena, M., 350n
 Longrigg, S., 81n
 Lopes, D., 292, 325
 Louis XIV, King, 99, 101, 303, 392
 Loyola, I., 81
luba, 169, 245, 314
 Lubo, 88
 Lucas, A., 3-4n, 6n, 19n
 Ludolphus, J., 33 & n, 62 & n, 83-5 & n,
 98-100, 102, 110 & n, 112-3 & n,
 125 & n, 140 & n, 142 & n, 145-6 & n,
 152, 168 & n, 178 & n, 185, 189-90 & n,
 199, 206 & n, 209, 213 & n, 219 & n,
 225n, 235 & n, 239 & n, 246-7, 249n,
 255, 261 & n, 270-3 & n, 278-9 & n,
 281 & n, 284-7 & n, 294-5 & n, 298-
 300 & n, 311, 314-7 & n, 332 & n,
 340 & n, 359 & n, 396
 linxes, 215

 McCrindle, J. W., 38, 42
 mace, 357
 Madagascar, 365
 madder, 357 & n
 Madeira Islands, 270
 Madhen Zamada, 120
 Madina, 50-1, 380
 Maedoro, 233
 Maegoga, 233
 Maetzuyker, 300
 Magaza, 110
 Magech, River, 275
 Magelb, 275
 Magro, M., 228
 Maguena, 247
mahabar, 197 & n
 Mahfuz, Amir, 74-6, 374-5
mahlab, 353 & n
 Mahrein, 28
 Mahteme Sellassie, 155 & n
 Mai Chew, 204
 Mai Turub, 32
 Mai Tzada, 204, 216
 mail, coats of, 159, 162, 164-5, 170, 289
 Maillet, C. de, 99-101, 301-3, 318, 320,
 352
 Maitsha, 116, 147, 193, 209, 241
 maize, 202-4 & n, 206, 231, 249
 Makana Sellassie, 146, 205, 308
 Makeda, Queen, 9
 Malabar, 37, 291, 356, 368
 Malacca, 357-8, 360
 Malamat, A., 9
 Malao, 19, 22-3, 363n
 malaria, 241
 Malaya, 369, 386
 Malik Ambar, 384, 419-20
 Malik Muayyad, 210
 Malindi, 59, 314-5, 338, 357-9, 367,
 371-2
Malkanya, 122
 Malunche, 204
 Mamelukes, 289, 332, 394
 Manadeley, 144, 183, 284, 310, 406
 Managasha, Mount, 141
 Mancuba, 350
 Manicongo, 110, 261
 Manoel I, King, 74, 270, 291-2
 Manucci, N., 300n, 383 & n
 Manz, 60
 Mao Kun, 371
 Mao Yuan-Yi, 371
 Maqrizi, 69, 100, 238, 251, 381 & n
 Mara, 61
 Marco Polo, 65-6 & n, 93, 100, 104-
 5 & n, 143 & n, 200 & n, 215 & n,
 224 & n, 307
 Marcoseos, 291
 Mareb, River, 114, 202, 219n
 Maria Theresa dollar, 228, 268
markab, 278
 markets, 147, 307-8, 310-11, 321, 347
marowti, 258, 315
 marriage, 248n
 Masafent, Period of the, 100
mashila, 208
 Masin, 176
masob, 251
 Masqala Kristos, 156
 Masruk, 45, 48
 Massawa, 8, 56-7, 59, 75, 77-8, 81, 85,
 96-7, 102, 107-10, 162-3, 184, 189,

- Massawa—*continued*
 191, 202, 215, 240-1, 267-8, 285-6,
 291, 303-4, 309-12, 317-8, 321-9,
 330-46, 348-9, 358, 360, 376-7, 379,
 388, 391, 398
 Massawa, Pasha of, 329, 331
 Masudi, 45n, 58, 347, 350, 364, 381
 Matlia, 28
 mats, 209
 Matthew, Envoy, 74-5, 291
 Mauro, Fra, 70, 100, 141, 270
 Maya, 161
 meat, 28, 40, 158, 200, 219, 249-51,
 284, 348, 350-1, 358
 meat, raw, 244, 248 & n, 250-1, 387
 Mecca, 47-8, 51, 54-6, 61, 69, 108, 195,
 255-6, 308, 324, 329, 335, 339, 345,
 347-9, 356-9, 377, 380
 Meder, 28
 Medici, Duke L. dei, 138, 356, 375
 medicines, 95, 240-2, 244-7, 292, 299,
 301-2, 309, 340, 350, 353 & n, 356,
 396
 Mehren, M. A. F., 347n
 Mek, 156
 Mendes, A., 83-4, 97, 100, 228-9
 Menelik I, King, 9
 Menelik II, Emperor, 30n, 393
 Mensa, 26
 Mentuab, Empress, 87-8, 151, 153 & n
 Mérab, Dr., 397n
 Merca, 372
 mercury, 357
 Meroe, 27, 29 & n
 Meropius, 33-4
 Merraihan, 161
 Mesle, 168, 398
metat, 240
 Metchakel, 193
 Metee the Less, 350
 Metical Aga, 102, 345
 Meynard, P. de and Courteille, P. de,
 45n
 mice, 235
 Michele, Fra, 72
 Mikael, Ambassador, 311
 Mikael Schul, Ras, 87-8, 113, 130, 132,
 151, 171, 192, 198, 240, 304-5, 335-6,
 345, 379
 milk, 200, 216, 219, 246, 249, 346
 millet, 202, 204-6, 338, 348, 358
 Mills, J. V., 367n
 Minas, Emperor, 80, 100, 243, 327
 Mine, 273
 minerals, 224-9
 Ming Shih, 368
 Minorsky, V., 347n
 mirrors, 154, 353
 Mocha, 14, 22, 85, 109, 227, 285, 336
 Mocquet, J., 385
 Mogadishu, 21-2, 59, 69, 106-9, 268,
 314n, 338, 351, 357-9, 365-8 & n,
 371-2, 387
 Mohamed, Prophet, 47-55, 104, 117,
 380
 Mohamed IV, Sultan, 80, 327
 Mohamed al Ikshid, 382
 Mombasa, 59, 85, 359, 371-2
 monasteries, 249, 301. See also monks
 money, primitive, 32, 40, 95, 157-8, 179,
 260-6, 391
 Monfallot, 316
 monkeys, 215, 217, 235. See also apes
 monks, 196, 214, 277, 373
 Monomotapa, 261, 316
 monsoon, 3, 13-14, 318, 356
 Monti della Corte, A. A., 62n, 142,
 153, 157n, 275n, 294-5n, 299-300n
 Moon, Mountains of, 15, 23
 Mooney, H. F., 212n
 Moors: see Muslims
mogmoqo, 156
 Mora, 61
 Morocco, 307, 324
 mortar, 148, 275, 297-8, 348
 Moses, 119, 396
 Mossolov, A. A., 383
 Mosylum, 20, 22-3, 363n
 Mu'allaaqat of Tarafah, 37
 Muchale, 168
 Mughuls, 300, 384
 Muhammad: see Mohamed
 Muir, W., 49-50 & n, 52 & n
 Mujahid Shah, 384
 mules, 9, 138, 166-8, 174-5, 180-1,
 190-1, 215-7, 237, 263, 272, 278, 288,
 307, 309, 319, 354, 397
 Müller, H., 26n
 Mundus, 20, 22, 350, 363n
 Murad, G., 299-300, 302-3
 Murad ibn Madlum, 271, 334, 353
musa ensele, 116, 208-9
 Mushu, 318
 musk, 357, 367
 Muslims, 105, 147, 153, 155-6, 159-63,
 175-6, 180, 188, 210-1, 219, 224,
 227, 243, 265, 269, 283-9, 294,
 306-7, 309-11, 313, 315, 320, 322,
 325, 335, 355, 357, 363, 372, 375,
 378-9, 382, 391-2, 398
 Mustansir, Sultan, 269
 mustard, 204, 206, 249
 Mutanabbi, 283
 Muza, 19, 22-3
 myrrh, 3-8 & n, 19-20, 22, 221, 307,
 311, 315, 344, 360, 363, 367-8
 Naakuto Laab, King, 62-3, 100
 Nabataea, 23

- Nacati, 350
 Nacchi, A., 341
nagarits, 112, 117, 328
Nagash, 129
 Nagran, 45
 Najah, 381
Najashi, 50, 58-9
 Naod, Emperor, 100, 134, 374
 Nanina, 294
 Nara, 117
 Nasi: see Massawa
 Neapolitans, 290
Nebura Ed, 129
 needles, 315, 353
 Nefas Mawcha, 115
Negadras, 128
 Nehsi, 6
 Newaya Kristos, Emperor, 316
 Nicholas, Brother, 106
 Nicodemus, Brother, 70, 106
 Nikon, 21-2
nidad, 241
 Nile, River, 6, 10-12, 14-17, 23, 41, 316, 321
 Nile, Blue, 80, 111, 113, 116, 172, 202, 210, 225-7, 269-71, 273-4, 286, 311, 321, 393
 Nile, White, 319
 Noba, 29
 Nobii, 109. See also Nubia
 Noldeke, T., 36
 Nonnonus, 47
 Noshirwan, King, 48
 Nubia, 29, 37, 49, 57, 60, 104, 107, 109, 316, 319, 326, 350, 382, 389
 Nubians, 117, 161n
nug, 208, 278
 nuns, 196, 308, 326
 Nur b. Mujahid, 239
 Nur ibn al Wazir, 78-80, 294
 nutmeg, 257, 267

 Obeid Allah Yaqut, 351
 obsidian, 19, 22
 Ocelis, 22-3
 Ogaden, 79
 oil, 18, 21-2, 35, 357
 oilseeds, 208, 248, 348 & n
 Olok, 20
 Oman, 387
 onions, 196, 204, 206
 Ophir, 8-9
 opium, 350, 357-8
 Opone, 21-3
Oquea: see *Waket*
 oranges, 212-3
 Ormuz, 291, 307, 359-60
 oryxes, 367-8
 ostrich feathers, 355
 ostriches, 364, 367-8

 Othman b. Afan, 50-1
 Othman b. Matzun, 50
 Ottomans: see Turks
 Oviedo, A. de, 81
 oxen, 135, 166, 169, 172, 180, 183, 190, 192, 200, 216, 250
 Ozdemur, Pasha, 327

 pack animals, 8-9, 28, 263
 Pais, G., 97, 100, 185, 230, 233
 Pais, P., 81-2, 100, 108, 134, 139, 144, 185-8, 193, 211, 213, 218-9, 225, 233, 235, 241, 244, 246, 261, 265, 295, 297-8 & n, 306, 316, 329, 334n, 352, 396
 Pakenham, T., 133n
 Palestine, 36, 55n
 Pankhurst, R., 197n, 337n, 394n
 Pankhurst, S., 64-5n, 78n, 83n, 86n, 149-50n, 309n, 337n
 Pano, 21-2
 papayas, 213, 395
 paper, 353 & n
para, 268
 parchment, 288
pardaõ, 265
 Paribeni, R., 32 & n
 pasturage, 169, 215-7, 281, 312, 338
pataca, 184 & n
 Pate, 59, 85, 314
 peaches, 212-3, 249
 peacocks, 8
 pearls, mother of pearl, 18, 338, 344, 357-8, 364, 367, 387n
 pears, 213
 peas, 202, 204-6
 Peiser, F. E., 85n, 149n, 171n, 280n, 287n, 312n
 pepper, 14, 17, 206 & n, 250-1, 300, 307, 340, 349, 367-9
 Perehu, 6-7
 Pereira, B., 349, 377
 Pereira, F.M.E., 44n, 239n, 275n, 288n, 298n
Periplus, 12-13, 16-34, 27, 36, 39, 97, 350, 363n
 Perruchon, J., 86n, 121n, 141n, 149-50n, 160n, 175n, 195n, 210n, 212n, 214n, 237n, 239n, 261n, 294n, 298n, 377n
 Persia, 10, 29, 36-7, 39, 47-8, 55, 300, 302, 348, 356, 366, 370, 372, 376, 387, 389
 Persians, 10, 46, 359, 363-5, 381
 Pharaohs, 3-4, 8
 Philotheos, Patriarch, 60
 Phoenicians, 8
 pigs, 217
 pins, 253

- Pipalo, 363. See also Popali
 Pires, T., 94, 100, 107 & n, 316 & n,
 352 & n, 357 & n, 375 & n
 Pliny, 12-13 & n, 17, 19-20 & n
 ploughing, 43, 117, 200, 216, 398
 ploughs, 286, 293, 397
 pomegranates, 35, 212-3, 345
 Poncet, C., 99-101, 129-31 & n, 146-
 7 & n, 150 & n, 152-4 & n, 171, 206 & n,
 211-3 & n, 219 & n, 226-7 & n, 258 & n,
 261 & n, 264 & n, 276-7 & n, 280 & n,
 288 & n, 300 & n, 302-4 & n, 311-2 & n,
 319-20 & n, 334 & n, 353-4 & n
 Popali, 362. See also Pipalo
 population, 115, 153, 155, 183, 204,
 406
 porcelain, 365, 367-70
 porters, 190-1, 235, 263, 397
 Portugal, 72, 74, 270, 291-2, 294, 299,
 324, 378, 386
 Portuguese, 72-9, 81-3, 85-6, 106, 110,
 149-50, 159-63, 168, 184, 202 & n,
 224-5, 239, 241, 243, 245, 253, 257,
 270, 272, 275, 277, 291, 293-5,
 297-8, 300-1, 309-10, 314-5, 322-4,
 326, 329, 331, 347, 349, 352, 359-61,
 370, 375-6, 385-6, 395, 397-8
 Poseidon, 26-7
 potatoes, 206 & n
 potters, 287, 392-3
 pottery, 357
 pottery, Chinese, 369-70
 precious stones, 9, 356
 Prester John, 68-9 & n, 72, 104, 106-9,
 121, 269
 priests, 35, 83-4, 196-7, 199, 308, 326,
 373, 379, 391, 394, 397, 399
 Procopius, 37 & n, 40, 46-7 & n
 Ptolemy II, 10, 12n
 Ptolemy III, 25, 38
 Ptolemy, VII, 12
 Ptolemy the Geographer, 23-4
 pulse, 156, 158, 202, 204-6
 Punt, Land of, 3-8
 Pushkin, A., 377, 423-6
putchuk, 363 & n, 367
- Qal Hatze*, 130
qamis, 255
qanda kabaro, 283
 Qansuh al Ghawri, 74
 Qarfuna, 350
 Qeda, 120, 161
 Qesquam, 87, 153 & n
qolla, 201-2, 237
 Qorqora, 204, 310
 Qua el Kebir, 33
 Quaquera, 116, 193
 Quequea, 245-6 & n
- Quessan, River, 111
 Quiggin, A. H., 41, 261-2 & n, 265
quinda, 246
qulqual, 223, 258
 Qulzum, 347
 Quraish, 48-52
- rafts, 19, 274
 Raidan, 28
 rainy season, 41, 45, 142, 172, 224, 236,
 241-2, 273, 318, 340
 raisins, 357-8
 Ramses III, King, 8
 Ramses IV, King, 8
 Ranking, G. S. A., 356n
 Ranzano, P., 70, 100, 104
 Raphael, Brother, 200, 202, 212, 214-5,
 228-9, 245-6, 270, 311-2
 Raq Masare, 120
 Ras, 126, 129-30, 399
 Ras Binna, 21-2
 Ras Chenarif, 21-2
 Ras el Fil, 20, 22, 109, 117, 242, 354
 Ras el Kyl, 21
 Ras Hafun, 21-2, 350
 rats, 235
 Raynaud, F., 380n
 Raziya, Queen, 383
 razors, 266, 354
 reaping, 117
 Reb, River, 275, 301
 Reinaud, G. A., 347n, 351n
 resins, 4, 363 & n, 367 & n
 revenue, 121, 179-94, 328, 398
 Rey, C., 81 & n
 rhinoceros horn, 18, 22, 156, 355, 363-5
 rhinoceroses, 17, 41-43, 117, 215, 220,
 367
 rice, 21, 156, 200 & n, 357-8, 367-8
 rivers, 263
 roads, 26-7, 29, 108, 112
 rock churches, 62 & n, 86, 390. See also
 Lalibela
 Rockeya, 50-1
 Rockhill, W. W., 366n, 368n
 Roha: see Lalibela
 Roman Catholics, 284-9, 318, 396. See
 also Jesuits
 Romans, 12-13, 39
 Romans, Eastern, 32-5, 37, 39, 45-7, 54,
 389
 Rombullo, P., 70, 93, 100, 104-5
 Rome, 68, 70, 93, 98n, 322
 roses, 357-8
 rosewater, 357-8 & n
 Rostovtzeff, M., 10n
rotile, 344n
 Roule, L. du, 271, 320
 Roumys, 307 & n, 324, 359

- royal family, imprisonment of, 60, 95,
 113, 133-6
 royal farms, 179, 183, 189
 rue, 206
 Rufinus, 33-4
 rugs, 367
 Rukn ud din Barbak Shah, 383
 Rüppell, E., 147, 155, 275n, 379
 Russia, 383, 423-6
 rye, 206

 Sabala, 29
 Sabastos, 305
 Sabbath, 70, 78, 83 & n, 396
 Sachin, 384
 Sadaqa Nesrani, 298
 safflower, 258 & n
 Sagade, 109-10, 187-8
 Sager, F., 72
 Sahart, 186-7, 191n, 280
 Sahure, King, 3
 Saif ud din Firuz, 383
 St. Petersburg, 383
 Saladin, Sultan, 68
 Salawa, 109-10
 Salhen, 28
 Salicit, 187
 salt, 95, 189-01, 193, 225, 260, 264, 307,
 315, 346
 salt bars, 237
 salt currency, 32, 40, 95, 157-8, 179, 197,
 260-5, 376, 391, 396
 Salt, H., 17, 19n, 232, 343, 347n
 saltpetre, 160
 Samayat, 335
 Samba, River, 115
sambuqs, 340, 346, 351
 Samhar, 328-9, 336, 344
 Sana, 46-7, 109
 Sanacho, 148, 354, 406
 Sanayt, Amba, 186-7
 sandalwood, 357, 365, 367-8
sandaq, 117, 328
 Sankraber, 191
 sapanwood, 367
saqala, 142 & n
Sarag Masare, 129
 Sarapion, 21-2
 Sarbakusa, 172, 240
 Sarka, 105
 Sartsa Dengel, Emperor, 82, 100, 113,
 141, 163, 175, 184-5, 193, 226, 294,
 297, 327
 Sasu, 26 & n, 39-40
 satins, 255-6, 366-8
 Sausauat, 29
 Schoff, W. H., 6 & n, 17 & n, 19-21, 24,
 40n
 Schonfield, H. J., 11

 Schreike, B., 366n
 scissors, 266, 353
 scribes, 197, 199
 Seela Kristos, 185, 258
 segregation, 147, 153, 285, 287-8, 392
 Sei, Haji, 352
 Selim, Emperor, 74, 325
 Semien, 25, 29, 109-10, 114, 129-30,
 189n, 228, 239
 Senafe, 160, 187
senafich, 249
 senna, 213
 Sennar, 17, 22, 101, 109, 117, 154, 218-
 9n, 227, 239, 243, 246, 271, 301, 316-
 21, 352, 354-5
 Sequeira, D. de, 349
 sequin, 268
 Sera, 187
 Serae, 123, 186-7, 202, 219, 331
 Sergeant, R. B., 376n
 Serke, 146, 206, 406
 sesame, 200
 Sesea, 26n
 Sesostris, King, 4
 Shaiazana, 34
Shalaqa, 128, 130
shammas, 253, 255-6, 258
 Shanqellas, 116-7, 150, 156, 173, 227,
 240, 355, 378
 Sharkah, 159, 265
 Sheba, Queen of, 9, 60
 sheep, 10, 28, 156, 190, 193, 215-7, 234,
 256, 265, 344-5, 348, 357, 365, 367-8
 shells, 343
 Shembra Kure, 161
 Shems ed din, 247
 Shen Tu, 367
 Sherer, 357
 shields, 144, 159, 163-5 & n, 169, 171-2,
 183
 Shihos, 240, 329, 336
Shimagile, 182, 283
shimbra, 200-1
 ships: see boats
 Shiraz, 359
 Shire, 109, 114, 123, 187, 197, 213, 241,
 266, 288, 406
 Shita, River, 116
 Shoa, 58, 60-1, 63-4, 80, 108-9, 111,
 115, 120, 140, 143, 161, 172, 177,
 186, 198, 243, 267, 288, 293, 309,
 313, 347
 shoes, 158
 Shueiba, 49
Shum, 123, 126
 Sidama, 76, 80, 163
 Sidi Badr, 383
 Sidon, 357
 Sile, 275
 Silko, 49

- silks, 14, 46-7, 176, 180, 182-4, 254-6,
 258, 285, 300, 308-9, 313, 322, 327,
 340, 356-7, 365, 367-8
 Silva, M. da, 295, 300, 396
 silver, 4, 7-8, 18, 22, 28, 30, 32, 184,
 227-8, 255-6, 292-3, 308-9, 327, 347,
 352, 357, 365-8
 silversmiths, 292, 304, 345, 392
 Sinai, Mount, 239, 349
siwa, 166 & n, 189 & n, 249 & n, 251
 Skelton, R. A., 69
 skins, 6-8, 47, 184, 216, 223, 256-7, 266,
 288, 341
 slaves, 6, 8, 15, 18, 20-2, 40, 54-5, 57,
 59, 80, 86, 95, 105, 109, 114, 157,
 161n, 163, 173, 175-6, 189, 251, 315,
 317, 326, 339, 344, 347-9, 354-5, 358-
 60, 363-5, 372-88, 391-3
 smallpox, 48, 102, 238-41, 355
 Smeds, A., 209n
 Smith, A., 281
 Smyrna, 153, 304-5
 snakes, 215
 Sofala, 107, 328, 364, 372
 Sofya, Queen, 34
 Sogra, 290
 Sokotra, 110, 357-8
 soldiers, 76, 84, 88, 96, 115, 128, 130,
 137-40, 159-78, 198, 235, 274, 282-4,
 287, 289, 346, 348, 363, 373, 376,
 380-4, 391, 394-5, 399
 Soliman, amir, 377
 Solomon, Bahrnagash, 335
 Solomon, King, 8-9, 60, 63
 Solomonic line, 63-4, 115, 390
 Somaliland, 3, 12, 16, 26 & n, 33, 97,
 311, 362-3, 365, 369, 388
 Somalis, 75-6, 79, 161, 168, 175-6
 sorghum, 200, 203n, 206, 231n
 Sousa, F. de, 294
 Sousa, G. de, 294
 Sowdah 54
 Spain, 71, 82, 84, 294-5, 334
 Spaniards, 72
 spears, 55, 144, 159, 164, 168-9, 171-3,
 182-3 & n, 286, 353, 363
 Speke, J. H., 14-16 & n
 spices, 4, 9, 19-20, 22, 39, 310-11, 313,
 325, 351, 369
 Spices, Market and Cape of, 20, 22-3
 spikenard, 253 & n
 spinning, 281, 398
 Stigand, C. H., 59 & n, 381n
 storax, 363 & n
 Strabo, 12-13 & n
 Suakin, 56, 61, 74-5, 85, 106-9, 112,
 299, 311-2, 324-7, 331-2, 338-9, 349,
 355, 357-8, 372
 Sudan, 9, 48, 219, 227, 265n, 270, 280,
 317, 352, 354, 388, 391
 Suez, 357
 Suez Canal, ancient, 4, 6, 8, 10-12, 22
suf, 258
 sugar, 21, 208, 213-4, 366
 sulphur, 160
 Sumatra, 358
 Surat, 223, 258, 298, 311, 315, 342
 Suriano, F., 100, 143, 159, 238, 290-1
 Suriano, G., 77
 Susneyos, Emperor, 82, 84, 86, 96, 100,
 140, 145, 170, 184-5, 190, 198, 211,
 213, 226, 228, 330, 336, 238, 249, 258,
 295, 329, 331, 377-8, 395, 397, 400
 swords, 6-7, 18, 117, 159, 162, 164, 173,
 182, 255-6, 289, 292, 304, 363
 Sykes, P., 48n
 syphilis, 243-4
 Syria, 10, 18, 36, 293, 299, 302, 356,
 382-3
 Syrians, 33-6, 247, 283, 292-3

 Tabac, 21-2
tabot, 278 & n, 309 & n
 Tabunga Mufriq, 289
 Tadbaba Maryam, 78, 129
 Tafazes, 233
 tailors, 257, 295
taj, 138, 166, 196, 251-2, 277, 279
Taj, *Azaj*, 128
 Takaze, River, 26, 29-30, 109-10, 114,
 242
 Takla Giyorgis, 168, 393
 Takla Haymanot, Abuna, 62-4, 115,
 390, 400
 Takla Haymanot I, Emperor, 100, 271,
 320, 393
 Takla Haymanot II, Emperor, 100
 Takla Haymanot, Prince, 60
Talalaq Blattengeta, 129
talla, 189 & n, 234, 236, 249 & n, 251, 279
 Tambien, 123, 186-7, 191n, 226, 229
 Tambisso, 320
 Tamcha, River, 119
 Tamerlaine, 71
 Tamrin, 9.
 Tana, Lake, 15, 109-11, 116, 142, 213-4,
 242-3, 276-7, 295, 297, 311, 397
tanaka, 239
 Tanganyika, 16, 370
 Tangouri, 286
tankwa, 276-7, 298
 tanning, 256, 258
 tapeworm, 221, 244-5
 Taranta, 329
Tarasamba Azaj, 128
 taxation, 76, 87, 97, 105-6, 155, 179-94,
 249n, 307, 313, 318, 322, 331, 352,
 354, 379, 391
 Tayif, 48

- lef*, 200 & n, 202, 204-6, 208, 231, 236, 245, 278
 Tegulet, 64, 109
 Telles, B., 84n, 97, 110 & n, 274 & n, 256 & n, 264 & n, 296 & n, 298 & n, 340 & n, 346 & n, 377-8 & n
 tents, 122, 137-40, 142 & n, 146, 156, 159, 181, 288
Teqaqen Azaj, 128
Teqaqen Blattengeta, 126 & n
 Termah, 350
 Tewodros: see Theodore
 Tewoflos, Emperor, 100, 240
 textiles, 18-20, 22, 105, 253, 353. See also cloth, cotton, silks
 thatching, 287
 Theodore I, Emperor, 64, 100, 270, 400
 Theodore II, Emperor, 30n, 393
 Theodore, rebel, 240
 thermal water, 246-7
 Thomas, Brothers, 106, 123, 143, 196, 202, 211, 215, 224, 256, 260, 290, 309, 312-3, 316, 326, 350
 Thomson, J. O., 12 & n, 23-4
 Thuthmose III, King, 7-8
 Thywa, 34
tibbar, 355
 Tigre, 8, 58, 76, 87-8, 109-10, 112-4, 120-1, 123, 129-30, 132, 144, 147, 160-2 & n, 165, 171-2, 175, 180, 182-3, 186-9, 191, 193, 196-8, 200, 204, 206, 215-6, 218, 225, 228, 230, 233-5, 238-9, 241, 243, 249, 253, 256, 258, 261, 263, 266, 284, 288, 297, 305, 309, 335, 345, 379
Tigre Makonnen, 129, 182
 Tigrinya, 113
 Timbuctoo, 316
 tin, 12, 19, 22, 229, 292
 Tiran, 45
 Tokar, 106, 326
 tortoise-shell, 18-22, 363, 365
 towns, 143-58, 368. See also capitals
 trade, 6, 10, 13-24, 36-41, 73, 75, 80, 87, 95, 97, 99, 156, 188-9, 223-4, 227, 285-6, 302, 307-21, 338-88, 390, 392, 400
 trade routes, 3-4, 6-10, 12-16, 26-7, 29, 40-1, 48-9, 58, 71, 75, 113-4, 307-21
 traders, 9, 14-15, 49, 176, 261, 283-6, 291, 294, 298, 300, 303, 305-21, 332, 335-6, 341, 345, 348, 351, 355-6, 359-60, 365, 374, 378, 391
 Trajan, Emperor, 11, 23
 transport problems, 98, 146, 235, 263, 272-80, 391, 397
 Tricarico, M. A. da, 336
 Trimmingham, J. S., 27 & n, 51-2 & n, 57n, 59-62 & n, 67n, 69n, 75 & n, 79-80 & n, 85n, 153n, 168n, 210n, 236n, 239n, 289n, 327-8n, 372n
 Tristão da Cunha, 74
 trousers, 253-5, 258
 trumpets, 166
tsaddo, 252 & n
Tsahafe Lam, 121, 129
Tsahafe Taezaz, 109-10
 Tsalamt, 191n, 228
 Tsarene, 29 & n
 Tuan Cheng-Shih, 362
 tuberculosis, 244
 Tunis, 307, 316, 352
 Turkey, 85, 254, 309, 359, 387
 Turks, 71, 74-7, 96-7, 110, 159, 161-3, 165, 184, 207, 226, 228, 255-7, 289, 292, 295, 302, 305, 307n, 311, 314, 317, 322, 324, 327-9, 332-4, 339, 345-6, 353, 359-60, 375-8, 392, 398
 Tzegarde, 242
 Tzamba, 301
 Ubud Allah b. Tahsh 52-3
 Ufat, 144
 Umar b. al Khattab, 56
 Umm Habibah, 52-4
 Umm Salma, 54
 United States Interdepartmental Committee on Nutrition, 208
 Utulit, 8
 Varthema, L. di, 93, 100, 348 & n, 356 & n, 359 & n, 375, 382 & n
 Vasiliev, A. A., 44n
 venereal diseases, 243-4
 Venetians, 291-1
 Venice, 69-72, 154, 268, 290, 313, 342-3, 360
 vermilion, 353, 357, 368
 Verzeau, J., 317n, 320
 Victoria, Lake, 15
 vines, 213. See also grapes
 Vis: see Wis
 Voge, 106, 108, 265
 Wadela, 87
 Wadj, 78, 141, 293
 Wag, 63n
 Wagara, 111, 116, 141, 146-7, 156, 190, 206, 218, 235, 239, 241-2
 wages, 62, 157
waginos, 246 & n
Wagshum, 63n
 Wainwright, M., 10n, 365n
 Waito, 173
 Walabu, Mount, 79
 Walaqa, 112, 115, 186, 212

- Walaqa, River, 109-11
 Walda Giyorgis, 150
 Waldaba, 240-1
 Waldmeier, T., 276
 Walel, Mount, 80
 Wallata Giyorgis, 243
 Wallega, 26n, 80
 Walqayt, 109-10, 188, 193, 242
 Wambar, 126-7 & n
 Wambarma, 116
 Wambarya, 226
 Wanchit, River, 113
 Wang Ta Yuan, 366
 Wansleben, J. N., 83n
wanza, 152, 221 & n, 278
waqet, 180n
 war, effects of, 73, 77, 95-7, 175-8, 281, 314, 373, 378, 391, 398
 Warmington, E. H., 3n
wars, 360
 Wasal, 204
waskambya, 250 & n
 Waslu, 374
 watercress, 204
 Watt, W. M., 49n
 wax, 156, 189, 214, 248, 315, 341, 344, 348, 350, 352, 359
wayna daga, 116 & n, 201
 Wazeba, King, 32, 401-2
 weavers, 190
 weaving, 179, 188, 281, 284, 286, 398
 Webi, River, 78-80
 Wedem Arad, Emperor, 69
 Wehni, 87, 109, 133n, 135-6
 Weled Saala, 82
 wheat, 19, 21-2, 28, 116, 156, 196, 200, 202, 204-6, 208, 231, 234, 239, 351, 357-8
 Whiteway, R. S., 77n, 81n, 160-3n, 180n, 184n, 205n, 216n, 218n, 224n, 228-9n, 254n, 284n, 287n, 294n, 314n, 360n, 364n
 Wiet, G., 269-70n, 289n
 Wilford, F., 15n
 Wilqam, 210
 wine, 12, 18-19, 22, 28, 156, 158, 252, 395
 Wis, 310 & n
 women, 166, 171, 177, 189, 251, 253-6, 373-6, 381-2, 285
 wood, 4, 6-8, 139, 158, 221, 251, 277, 287-8, 351
 Wuchacha, Mount, 141
wushish, 206
Wust Azaj, 129
 Wright, S., 30n, 96
 Wylde, A. B., 206n
 Yagbea Tseyon, Emperor, 67-8
 Yaksum 48
 Yaman, 12-13, 27, 32, 36, 45, 48-9 & n, 58-9, 85, 105, 109, 210, 303, 342, 347, 381
 Yaqob, Emperor, 82
 Yasum, River, 115
 Ye Maryam Barea, 88
 Yeha, 22, 47
 Yekuno Amlak, Emperor, 63-4, 100
 Yekuno Amlak, Monastery, 196
 Yeshaq I, Emperor, 69, 71, 180, 289, 292, 394
 Yeshaq, Bahrnagash, 81, 327-8
 Yiberri, 161
 Yodit, 60, 381n. See also Gudit
 Yohannes I, Emperor, 99-100, 150, 153, 300, 388, 392
 Yohannes II, Emperor, 89
 Yostos, Emperor, 100, 220
 Yusuf, King, 45
 Zabid, 109, 161, 163, 327, 339, 377, 381
 Za Dengel, Emperor, 81-2, 100, 294, 334
 Zagwe dynasty, 61-4, 68, 100, 115, 390, 400
 Za Hekele, King, 17
 Zalot, 144
 Zama, 186-7
 Zancar, 144
Zandaraba Azaj, 128
Zangada, 206
 Zanzibar, 59, 314, 364-6, 369, 372
 Zara Yaqob, Emperor, 70, 72, 93, 100, 120-1 & n, 141, 247, 270, 286, 289-90, 399
zargunchos, 144, 164, 168-9, 286
 Za Sellassie, 82
 zebras, 300, 331, 364, 367-8
zegba, 221 & n
 Zeila, 19, 22, 58-9, 61, 69, 74-5, 105, 107, 161-2, 227, 312-4, 325, 338, 346-9, 359-60, 364, 372, 374-7, 381
Zenahu la Galla, 96
 Zequala, Mount, 141
zermabub, 286
 Zigan, 193
 Zing, 23
 Zingion, 23, 39
 Zinjs, 380
 Zinnser, H., 238n, 243n
 Zorgi, Brother, 312
 Zorzi, A., 93, 100, 106-7, 123, 141, 143, 196, 200, 202, 211-2, 215, 228-9, 245, 256, 260, 266, 270, 282, 290-1 & n, 307-9, 314n, 316, 326, 350
 Zoscales, King, 16-17, 27
 Zulla, 346
 Zwai, Lake, 108, 141, 229n